STC

intercom

MAY/JUNE 2021

THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

INCLUSIVITY IN TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

The technical communicator's role in supporting and influencing diversity, equity, and inclusion

4 Design Processes that Empower from Within
8 Using Inclusive Language
12 Creating an Inclusive UX Experience
18 Appreciating Neurodiversity
24 An Antidote to Exclusion and Inequity
30 Tips to Improve Document Accessibility
36 Language and Design for Inclusive Usability
40 DEI Efficacy Using Emotion Analytics
46 DEI in Technical Curricula

Expand your knowledge and enhance your education with

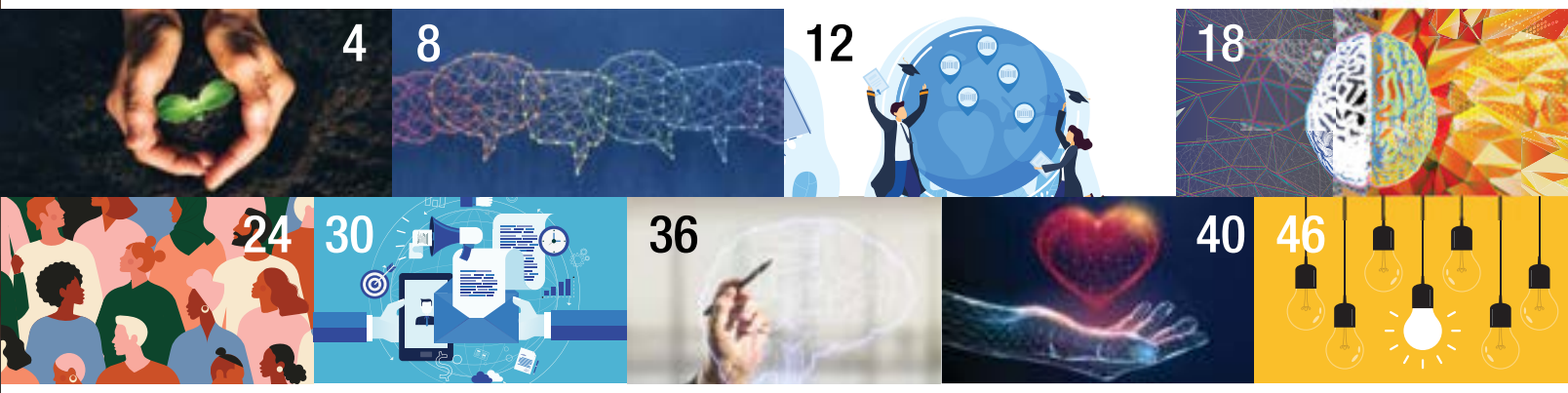
STC Live Webinars

Technical communicators looking for education where they are will find a range of options with STC live Webinars. Topics range from skill development to leadership, management, technology, content and business strategy, and so much more.

STC live Webinars provide two (2) CEUs toward the continuing education requirement for CPTC.

See the full calendar at ***www.stc.org/live-webinars.***

For general inquiries, interest in presenting a webinar with STC, and questions about registration and payment, please contact us at ***education@stc.org.***



May/June 2021

Volume 68 | Issue 3

2 **From the Editor**
By Alisa Bonsignore

FEATURES

4 **Empowering from Within: Uttering Voices and Planting Seeds**
By Huatong Sun
Lessons learned from her community engagement work in her design classes, and what an inclusive design process really entails.

8 **Inclusive Language: The Right Thing to Do**
By Larry Kunz, STC Fellow
Inclusive language is about using words and phrases that make readers feel included and comfortable—and avoiding terms that make them feel rejected or offended.

12 **UX and the Online Classroom**
Meghalee Das, STC Student Member
Creating an inclusive experience for international and non-native, English-speaking students.

18 **Being an Ally: A Journey to Appreciate Neurodiversity**
By Viqui Dill, Associate Fellow
The author shares her personal story and what STC members can do to be better allies for neurodiversity.

24 **Intention is the Antidote to Exclusion and Inequity**
By Shawneda Crout
The goal of inclusion and equity must be intentional. Allies must be honest with themselves about how they can take part and why.

30 **Tips to Improve Document Accessibility**
By Char James-Tanny
How technical communicators can improve usability for everyone, including people with disabilities.

36 **The Pen is Mightier Than the Brain**
By David Dylan Thomas
Plain language and clear design can improve usability for everyone.

40 **Leveraging Emotion Analytics: Augmenting DEI Efficacy in Approach and Sustainment**
By Rozelle Monroe
Marketers have adopted emotion analytics to influence our consumer behaviors. Can the same technology be used to influence support for DEI initiatives?

46 **Industry Insights for Addressing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the TC Classroom**
BY RYAN WOLD, KATLYNNE DAVIS, ANN HILL DUIN, AND LEE-ANN KASTMAN BREUCH
A summary of a roundtable discussion by members of the University of Minnesota's Technical Communication Advisory Board (TCAB) on DEI in technical writing curricula.

SOCIETY PAGES

50 **STC's Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**
By Wendy Ross, Associate Fellow
Wendy Ross, Advisory Panel Chair, discusses the role of the panel, and how you can contribute to a more inclusive profession.

2021 Technical Communication Summit: Benefits of Going Virtual
Upcoming Workshops and Courses

COLUMNS

ETHICS
53 **Can Codes of Ethics Help Moderate Online Communication?**
By Michael Trice

DEPARTMENTS

OFF HOURS
56 **Local History and Tabletop Games**
By Timothy Esposito

intercom

Intercom, the magazine of the Society for Technical Communication, is published to provide practical examples and applications of technical communication that will promote its readers' professional development.

Publisher Society for Technical Communication
Chief Executive Officer Elizabeth E. (Liz) Pohland
Executive Editor Alisa Bonsignore
Editor Sarah Black
Designer Amy Bachhuber

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Scott Abel, *Meet the Change Agents*
Thomas Barker, *The Academic Conversation*
Kit Brown-Hoekstra and Cindy Currie, *Ask a Tech Comm Manager*
Cruce Saunders, *Content Engineering*
Ryan Weber, *Student Perspectives*
Russell Willerton, *Ethics*

STC BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Officers
Craig Baehr, *President*
Kirsty Taylor, *Vice President*
Ben Woelk, *Immediate Past President*
James Bousquet, *Treasurer*
Timothy Esposito, *Secretary*
Directors Todd DeLuca, Ann Marie Queeney, Bethany Aguad, Laura Palmer

EDITORIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Kit Brown-Hoekstra, Chair
Saul Carliner
Michelle Corbin
Alyssa Fox
Michael Opsteegh

SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION
3251 Old Lee Highway, Suite 406
Fairfax, VA 22030
+1(703) 522-4114 | +1(703) 522-2075 fax
Send questions and correspondence to the editor at the above address. General information about STC: stc@stc.org *or* www.stc.org.

Address Changes: membership@stc.org
Intercom Editorial: intercom-editor@stc.org

Reprint Permissions: www.copyright.com
Intercom (ISSN 0164-6206) is published 6 times a year by the Society for Technical Communication, 3251 Old Lee Highway, Suite 406, Fairfax, VA 22030, a nonprofit educational organization, as a service to its membership. Membership in STC includes an online subscription to **Intercom**. Periodicals postage paid at Fairfax, VA, and additional offices.
Postmaster Send address changes to **Intercom**, Attn: Membership, c/o Society for Technical Communication, 3251 Old Lee Highway, Suite 406, Fairfax, VA 22030.
Copyright © 2021 by the Society for Technical Communication. All rights reserved. Printed in the USA. All articles in **Intercom** are copyrighted by the authors unless otherwise indicated. Anyone interested in reprints, reproductions, or reuse must contact the authors for permission.
To advertise in **Intercom**, contact *intercom@stc.org*, Society for Technical Communication, 3251 Old Lee Highway, Suite 406, Fairfax, VA 22030. Ph: +1(703) 522-4114.

A Note from the Editor

WORDS MATTER. ACCORDING to research from Stanford University, the words that we choose can knowingly or unknowingly play a role in how we perceive the world. Do we choose to include or exclude? "It's essential that all who engage with your brand, including people with disabilities, BIPOC audiences, and non-native English speakers, feel equally seen, welcomed, and supported by your business," says Lisa Dougherty of the Content Marketing Institute.

"[We] have implicit biases, which can sometimes be reflected in our edits," says Crystal Shelley in the blog for ACES: The Society for Editing. "Sometimes our biases show themselves in microaggressions. These brief, commonplace comments or actions—often unconscious or unintentional—that signal hostile or negative attitudes toward marginalized groups."

For this issue of *Intercom*, we're looking at the theme of inclusivity. There are multiple aspects of this theme. The first, of course, is how we, as technical communicators, approach inclusivity within our field. But the second—which has a much broader impact—is how we support inclusivity in our documentation, our writing, our strategy, and even the products our organizations produce.

This month's contributors are looking at inclusivity from a variety of perspectives.

Language can improve access—both in terms of belonging and accessibility. Larry Kunz discusses how Extreme Networks launched an inclusive language initiative to ensure inclusivity in all communications in "Inclusive Language: The Right Thing to Do." Char James-Tanny offers tips for improving accessibility and usability in her article, "Tips to Improve Document Accessibility."

In academia, Huatong Sun discusses "Empowering from Within: Uttering Voices and Planting Seeds," and how she's teaching (and still learning about!) empathy and inclusivity in design in her role as an Associate Professor of Digital Media and Global User Experience Design at University of Washington Tacoma. In "UX and the Online Classroom," Meghalee Das shares ways to make online learning more inclusive for non-native English speakers who may be learning from their home countries and grappling with unique technical and emotional challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We also look at intention. How can we work to broaden our networks and be allies to those who we perceive as "different" from ourselves? When it's reported that up to 80 percent of jobs are filled through networking, the people in your network matter. Shawneda Crout looks at how "Intention is the Antidote to Exclusion and Inequity." Viqui Dill talks about her lived experience of learning to be an ally for her son and others in "Being an Ally: A Journey to Appreciate Neurodiversity."

If marketers have adopted emotion analytics to influence our consumer behaviors, can the same technology be leveraged to influence support for diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives? Rozelle Monroe looks at new approaches in "Leveraging Emotion Analytics: Augmenting DEI Efficacy in Approach and Sustainment."

In "The Pen is Mightier Than the Brain," excerpted from his excellent book, *Design for Cognitive Bias*, David Dylan Thomas talks about how plain language and clear design improve usability for all. This was one of my favorite professional books of 2020, and I'm thrilled to share this with you this month.

In this month's Society Pages, Wendy Ross, chair of the STC Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Panel discusses why the panel was formed, the goals of the group, and how you can get involved. In the Ethics Column, Michael Trice examines codes of ethics and how they could be used to moderate our often-inflammatory online communication. And finally, we go Off Hours with Timothy Esposito, who gives us a look into two of his extracurricular interests: supporting local history and playing tabletop games. (*Pandemic*, in particular, seems like a timely choice.)

As always, I welcome your suggestions for future issues of *Intercom*. I'm looking forward to elevating new voices and exploring a diverse array of topics. I hope to have a chance to meet you in a breakout room at Summit 2021!

Alisa Bonsignore
(she/her)

REFERENCES

Shashkevich, Alex. 2019. "The Power of Language: How Words Shape People, Culture." Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://news.stanford.edu/2019/08/22/the-power-of-language-how-words-shape-people-culture/.*

Dougherty, Lisa [@BrandLoveLLC]. n.d. Twitter. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://twitter.com/BrandloveLLC.*

Shelley, Crystal. 2021. "Microaggressions in Editing." ACES Blog. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://aceseditors.org/news/2021/microaggressions-in-editing.*

CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL Technical Communicator CPTC™ PRACTITIONER

PRACTITIONER CERTIFICATION

OPEN NOW

Certified Professional Technical Communicator™ (CPTC)

Be a leader. *Have your Foundation Certification? Take your career to the next level by obtaining your Practitioner Certification.*

For more information about certification and to start the process, visit *www.stc.org* or email *stc@stc.org.*

Learn more at www.stc.org/certification

Empowering *from Within*

UTTERING VOICES AND PLANTING SEEDS

By HUATONG SUN

INCLUSIVE DESIGN DOESN'T just mean to represent and include different voices. A design process aiming for real inclusivity asks us to look at our users and communicate with them at the same eye level out of our humility, i.e., to empower from within. Being consciously aware of our systemic and personal biases is an important step leading towards this goal. Through this process, we help users utter their own voices and plant seeds to nurture culturally sustainable changes mutually in our communities.

Melinda Gates shared this story at the Goalkeepers Conference in 2019. One of their nonprofit organizations donated cows and provided training to help poor women farmers in Mozambique. Despite their goodwill, the program didn't go anywhere. What part went wrong? It started from the program logistics: The program asked each family to send one person to pick up cows and receive training on caring for livestock. However, in a male-dominated rural culture, the person who came to pick up cows was always a man, though the women at home were caring for the cows. As a result, the folks who were doing the real work of tending livestock never received the training they needed, even though the original goal of the funding program was to eliminate gender inequality and support women's entrepreneurship in rural regions.

This story demonstrates that details go a long way for inclusive design. To get to this eye level of cultural humility with our users and partners, we need to have critical reflections of our own biases from time to time.

This is a lesson I learned from my community engagement work in my design classes. For more than a decade, my advanced design classes have partnered with local underserved and under-resourced user groups who need a web presence or website upgrade for design empowerment. Our community partners include a Native American tribe, a free rural clinic, a multicultural center, a women's center, and non-profit organizations for people with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ communities.

"This is Not Our History"

I will never forget this client comment at our design model demo session a dozen years ago when I began to include community design projects in my classes in a Midwestern university. My graduate class was designing a website prototype for an online exhibition of a Native American tribe targeted to the tribe community and beyond. Funded by a grant through the Institute of Museum and Library Services, this project aimed to bring the exhibition experience online for those tribe members who were unable to visit it in person due to distance.

Because most of the tribe members didn't live in the local area, students collected information from our primary contact, "Ian," the communication specialist of that tribe office, assigned by the office director, "Dakota," a 40-year-old tribe member. Ian is a recent white male college graduate. He visited our class at the beginning of the project and answered a lot of questions about the client and the tribe we asked. We had a design model demo a few weeks later when Dakota came. After student groups presented their design concepts and wireframes, Dakota looked at us, "this is not our history." The class was dumbfounded.

To get to this eye level of cultural humility with our users and partners, we need to have critical reflections of our own biases from time to time.

Dakota used the timeline as an example to explain. In the design model, students chronicled artifacts into three eras including one era of "the treaty period." Dakota said that they would call that period "failed relationships." The class realized that the naming of the timeline represented a colonist view of Native American history, which continually oppressed and hurt the feelings of the targeted audiences even though our original goal was to help them to celebrate their heritage.

What part went wrong? As a new college graduate, Ian probably didn't realize his lack of tribe knowledge or awareness of his biases when he came to our class to give project information. He chronicled the tribe history with a mainstream view of the history he's familiar with. As a teacher who just stepped into the deep water of community-engaged design, I took the information from the site primary contact for granted and didn't critically assess it; I lost an opportunity of reminding my students to consider systemic bias and the residue of the power hierarchy during user research.

It was an eye-opening experience for everyone in that room. Shocked and also motivated, a student created a sidebar called "Voices" in her later design iteration. That sidebar brought together the tribe's voices of the past, the present, and even the future! Voices of the past and the present were displayed in the forms of historical quotes that further explained the archived pieces and commentaries from those people who were able to visit the on-site exhibition. It also specifically reserved the space to invite future conversations, including comment fields for feedback and reflections from website visitors. It created a place for potential poems and short stories inspired by the pieces as transformative work. This concept was adopted as the main feature by other teams as well, and it was greatly appreciated by the client and user representative from the tribe in the final demo.

"We're Networking. Not Volunteering."

My undergraduate students were very disappointed after attending the board meeting of a local community coalition. That rural community is located in the backyard of two global tech giants in the Greater Seattle region, Amazon and Microsoft. It was hit heavily by the rapid gentrification waves, and experienced challenges such as food hunger and housing affordability as the region rose to what the *Seattle Times* called, "one of the most economically potent spots in North America."

The coalition was founded fifteen years ago, beginning as a place for moms to exchange information and resources for raising kids, and later it expanded to become a clearinghouse for sharing and networking as a close community at the foot of a big mountain. One day the mayor ran into the coalition chair at a local meeting and said, "Your group has been doing great work for the community, but I cannot find your presence online. Why not have a website?" A nursing colleague who had been doing community work there for a few years connected my class with them.

My students were eager to help, and a group of them attended the next available monthly board meeting to research user requirements. Fifteen community members gathered in a meeting room of a local school district, who were affiliated with different local churches, community centers, school districts, facilities of health care, and community outreach offices of local organizations. At the meeting, my students and I were shocked to learn that some families had to pay $1,800 a month to live in a motel room in 2019; for comparison, the rent of an upscale three-bedroom townhouse in Bellevue was $2,200 eight years ago, 30 minutes north of this community. As people discussed plans to help motel families, the founder of the coalition reminded us: "We're here networking, but not volunteering." The next day a male student Erick reported this "confrontational moment" to the class and added that he felt like he was going to a gossiping club for housewives instead of a coalition. He said, "people in my community are living in motels. Why should we just do networking and share information, but not volunteer to make the changes right away?" His sentiment was echoed by the class.

It was a perfect storm and a messy design challenge, but it was also a good teaching and practice moment for inclusive design. With the help of the nursing colleague, I brought public health research about coalition practices and community assets to the class, and we had a lively discussion about what community empowerment means for this design project. I shared the quote of a public health researcher, Labonté, with my students: "Empower means 'the ability to choose,' or 'to increase one's capacity to define, analyze, and act upon one's problems.' We cannot 'empower' anyone; to presume so strips people of their capacity for choice. Empower is a reflexive verb; groups and individuals can only empower themselves. Our role may be to nurture this process and remove obstacles."

Lessons in Empathy and Empowerment

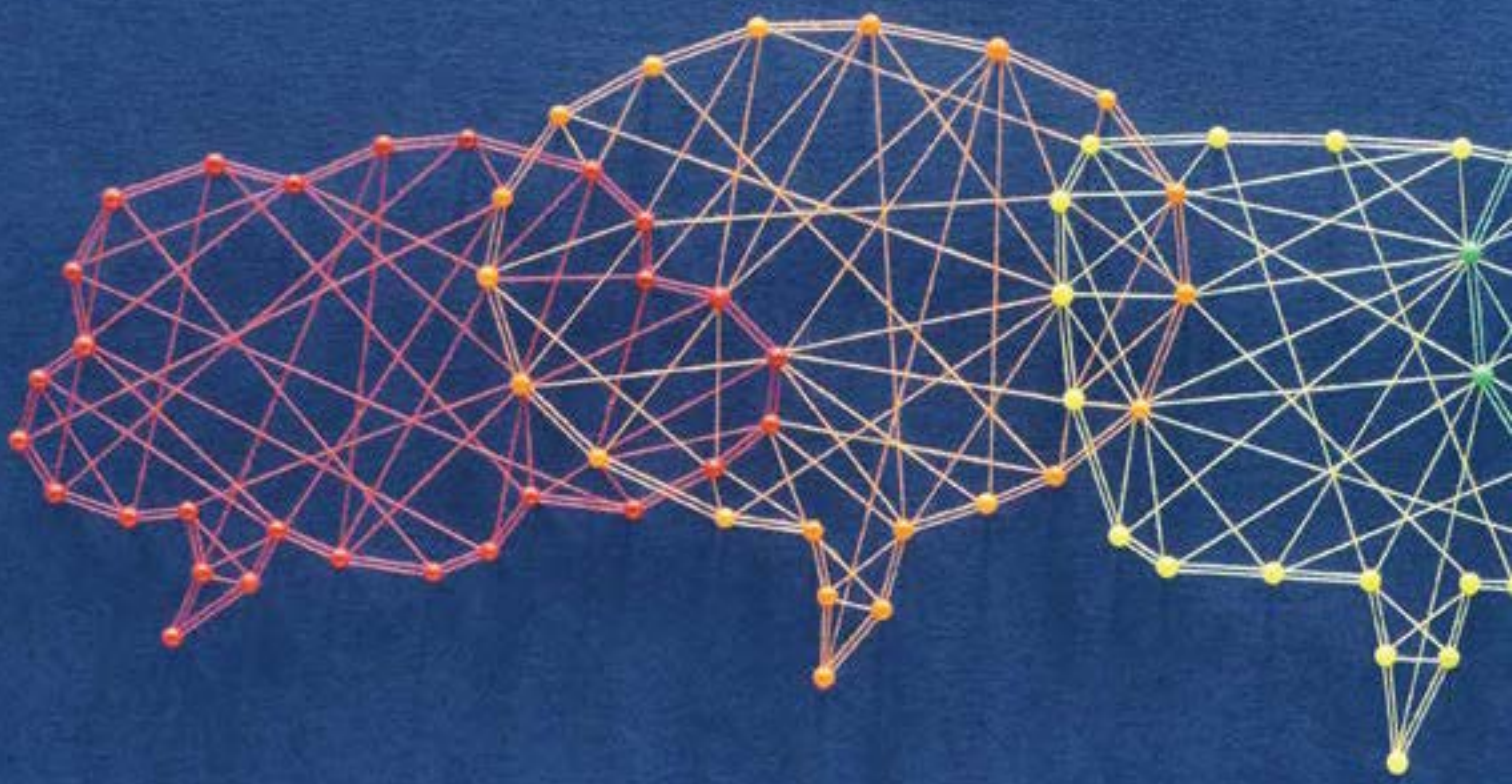
For true design empowerment, we need to respect the self-determination of the community organization that corresponds to its core functions. As designers, many times we are there helping local communities we partner with for projects "temporarily," and we leave after the project is over. To achieve more culturally sustainable design results, what we can do is to plant seeds, but not to enforce radical changes. Indeed, more impactful changes usually don't happen immediately. Inclusive empowerment asks us to support our community partners and communicate with them at their eye level, i.e., following their own paces without imposing our preferences on them. It's the same as what we do when our best friend approaches us for help: We try to be supportive, but not to be judgmental.

We brought our design prototypes to the board meeting in the following month. Students had a happy surprise—the mayor was there! Erick wrote in his end-of-quarter design reflection: "after this 'confrontation' it made me reflect and remember that my job was not to recreate the coalition, my job was to empathize and advocate for them. The way we would achieve this is through an efficient timeline and website, that promotes an effective system that engages with its audience to empower the coalition and promote the mission of the coalition."

The lesson I learned as a teacher is that I thought WE, as designers, were to help and transform local communities through these types of community engagement projects. But in the end, both my students and I gained a new perspective for inclusivity, and we were transformed into better designers and better selves. As we planted seeds in local communities, we were also planting seeds in our own hearts. Empowering from within happens mutually.

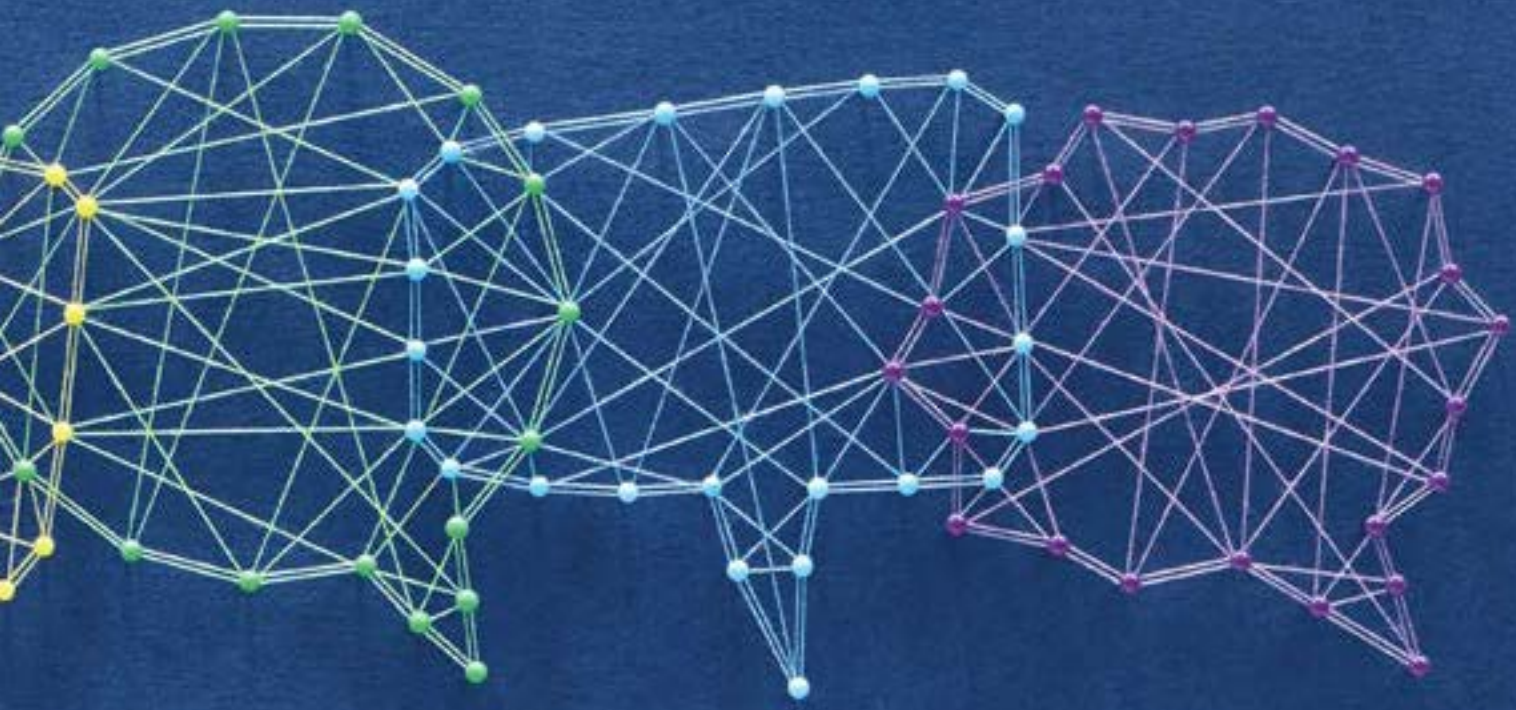
HUATONG SUN *(huatongs@gmail.com) is Associate Professor of Digital Media and Global User Experience Design at University of Washington Tacoma. She studies how to design and innovate for usable, meaningful, and empowering technology to bridge differences in a globalized world. The author of Cross-Cultural Technology Design (2012) and Global Social Media Design (2020) from Oxford University Press, she writes for pubic media like Fast Company and The Conversation, speaks at SXSW, STC, UXPA, CHI, and ATTW, and offers workshops at local SIGs and international conferences. Her Twitter handle is @huatongs.*

Inclusive The Right



Language: Thing to Do

By LARRY KUNZ | *STC Fellow*



IN THE WORLD of computer security, those with access to a program are on the *whitelist*. Everyone else is *blacklisted*.

How do those terms make you feel? Perhaps you're accustomed to hearing them, and you take them in stride.

Or perhaps the terms make you feel uncomfortable, even offended. If so, you have plenty of company.

Inclusive language is about using words and phrases that make our readers feel included and comfortable—and avoiding terms that make them feel rejected or offended.

Today's businesses increasingly understand the value of engaging with their customers. Because inclusive language strengthens the bonds of engagement, it's good business. And, because inclusive language is grounded in a basic respect for all people, it's simply the right thing to do.

Inclusive Language at Extreme Networks

In the fall of 2020, the Extreme Networks Information Development team, responsible for all customer-facing technical documentation, launched an inclusive language initiative. We identified a set of problematic terms and inclusive alternatives. Then we surveyed content creators throughout the company, asking them to react to the terms and select the alternatives they preferred.

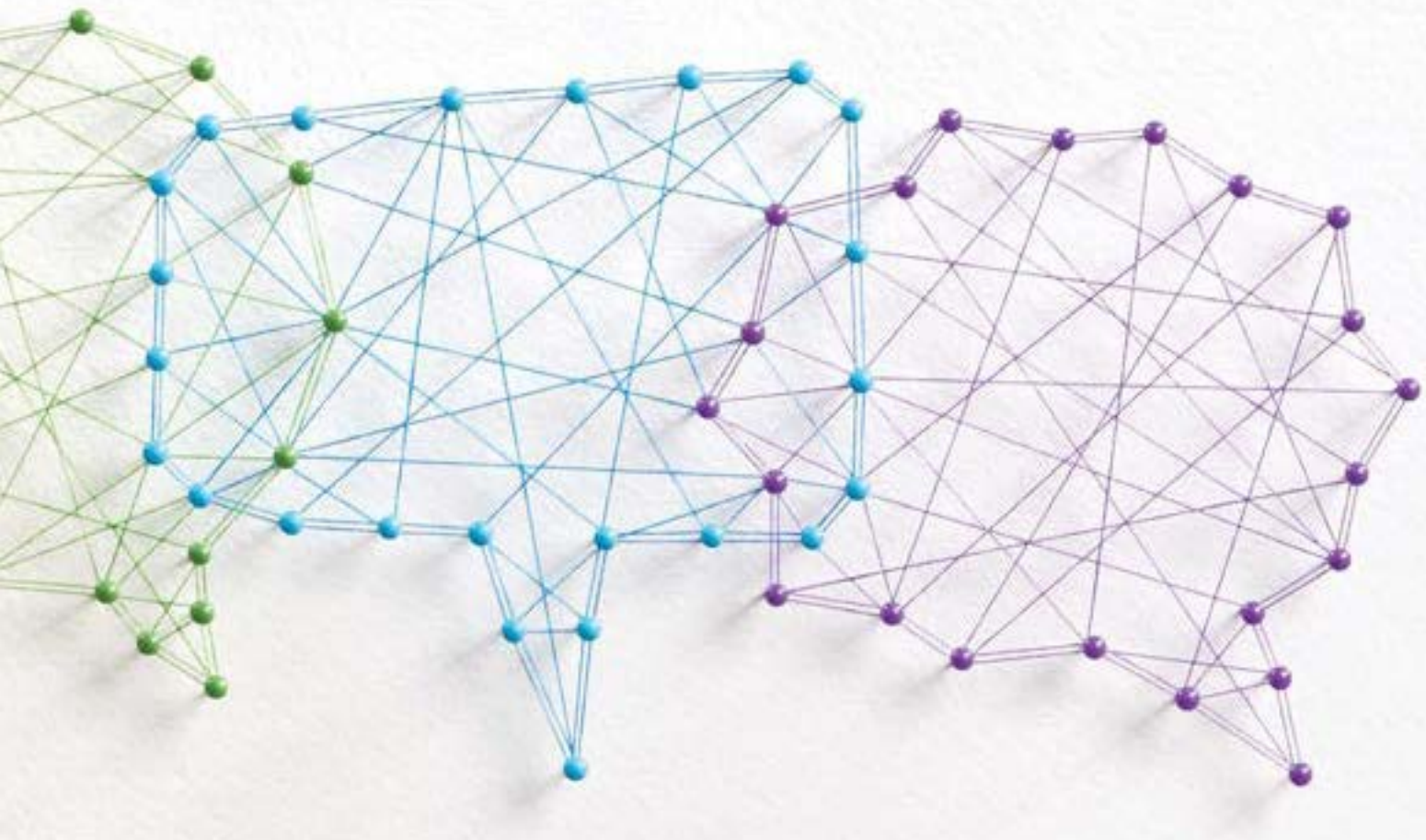
Our survey revealed a high level of interest: 91 percent of respondents answered yes to the question "Would you like to have a list of inclusive terms, available to all content creators at Extreme?"

Offensive terms	Inclusive alternatives
whitelist / blacklist	permit list / deny list
white hat / black hat	ethical / unethical
master / slave (noun)	controller / agent *or* server / client
master / slave (adj)	primary / secondary

Figure 1. The first inclusive language list at Extreme Networks

After analyzing the survey results and prioritizing the most crucial terms, we added the list of offensive terms and their inclusive alternatives to our style guide. Soon, with the support of Extreme's corporate-level Diversity and Inclusion Council, we'll post our list to the corporate intranet, along with a formal company policy, with the message that every content creator in the company is expected to use inclusive language.

Our list will grow as we identify other offensive terms and select the best inclusive alternatives. Our Inclusive Terminology working group serves as the gatekeeper for additions or changes to this list as it includes members of the main content creation groups in the company.



We're also reaching beyond content creators and engaging with software developers, because command lines, error messages, and user interfaces often contain offensive terms like *whitelist* and *blacklist*, or *master* and *slave*.

While we can't expunge offensive terms from long-established software products (or the documentation that describes them), we intend to guarantee—again, with the backing of executives—that new products and features use language that's inclusive.

As we proceed, we recognize that questions about "offensive" terms don't always have simple, straightforward answers.

Inclusive Language Across the Content-Creation Community

I've talked about inclusive language with technical writing colleagues from other companies, both one-on-one and in conference settings. People often tell me that they understand the need, but they have no resource to turn to. Few, if any, corporate style guides cover inclusive language, and no one has published a cross-industry list.

My conversation with Julio Vazquez, a technical writer at Cisco Systems, sparked the same eager response at Cisco that it had at Extreme. I've also affiliated with the **Inclusive Naming Initiative,** a cross-industry effort oriented mostly toward software developers, which recently began compiling a list of terms.

Now we're spreading the word, asking the broader community to help create and validate the public list of terms. This article is part of that effort. We encourage input from all customer-facing content creators including information developers, customer support staff, user experience designers, hardware and software designers and developers, and marketers.

An Ongoing Conversation

As we proceed, we recognize that questions about "offensive" terms don't always have simple, straightforward answers.

One respondent to our internal survey at Extreme wrote, "Technology has standard terms so that everyone knows what we are talking about. . . This is just people finding offense where there is none." In fact, you can make a strong case that some words—*disable* for example—are well established and shouldn't cause offense to anyone.

Terms like *disable* inhabit a gray area, and we haven't decided yet how to handle them. Each term needs to be evaluated separately, and those evaluations are ongoing. In the meantime, we believe that some terms, like the ones in our initial list, are clearly offensive and clearly in need of inclusive alternatives.

Those of us who advocate for inclusive language recognize that reaching our goal will take time and effort. But our original premise reminds us that the time and effort are worthwhile: Inclusive language is good business, and it's the right thing to do.

How You Can Participate

I invite you to join us in creating a resource that provides guidance to content creators on which non-inclusive terms to avoid, and which terms to use in their place. To participate, send an email to InclusiveTerminology@extremenetworks.com.

If you're ready to raise awareness for inclusive language in your workplace, I encourage you to discuss these terms with content creators in your organization—because this effort starts with the text itself. It'll also be helpful to get buy-in from upper management, so that your efforts are accepted company-wide. You can approach your Diversity and Inclusion team (now forming in many organizations) to discuss backing this initiative.

We invite you to start with the word list we expect to publish soon. Contact me to get a current copy and to receive updates as the list evolves.

LARRY KUNZ *(lkunz@extremenetworks.com) is a seasoned technical writer, editor, project manager, and trainer, having planned and executed numerous content-development projects for companies as diverse as Extreme Networks, IBM, and Abbott Labs. Larry teaches the Project Management section of Duke University's Technical Communication certificate program. He holds the rank of STC Fellow and received the STC President's Award for leading the Society's strategic planning effort.*

REFERENCE

The Inclusive Naming Initiative. n.d. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://inclusivenaming.org.*

UX and the Online Classroom

Creating an Inclusive Experience for International and Non-Native, English-Speaking Students

By MEGHALEE DAS | *STC Student Member*

HIGHER EDUCATION IN the United States is witnessing an "internationalization" of curricula, faculty, and students, says Rebecca Theobald of the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), there are over a million foreign students in the United States as of Fall 2020. However, in spite of their growing presence, these students are consciously or unconsciously expected to behave like model minorities and follow the norms of the dominant members of the community. As a result, the needs of international students often remain unnamed, and the challenges they face persist inconspicuously, unless they are momentarily the center of any news related to immigration. One such instance was when the international students present in the United States faced the risk of deportation if they attended classes online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the order was rescinded after national outcry, these incidents can cause tremendous mental strain; this, of course, is in addition to the challenges of bringing distinctive linguistic, social, and cultural differences to predominantly white universities.

As a technical communicator, I study how technology, human mediation, and empathy can be combined to facilitate an inclusive user experience (UX) for marginalized groups. In this article, I share contextual information that can help educators gain insight into the world of international students. I also use UX research strategies like user analysis, environment analysis, and task analysis to make recommendations related to class policies and technologies that can assist online instructors to create a culturally-sensitive and inclusive environment for international and non-native, English-speaking students. Many of these strategies can be applied in any educational context; however, they are particularly relevant to online educators and program administrators in the Global North, who have international students in their classes, as well as UX researchers and practitioners working with intercultural audiences.

Background

Enrollment of international students has been growing consistently in the United States, as educational institutions open doors to global talents, welcome new perspectives, encourage cross-cultural experiences, and promote diversity. Besides the intangible academic and cultural value, international students also have economic value. According to NAFSA: Association of International Educators, they contributed $38.7 billion to the U.S.

economy in 2019–2020, created over 500,000 jobs in the United States, and many of them are highly sought-after graduates, especially by organizations in STEM fields.

As a foreign-born woman of color in the United States who is a student, researcher, and an instructor of Technical Communication, I am conscious of how international students' value is often measured in economic terms, sometimes at the expense of their humanity. My own positionality also makes me acutely aware of the differences in culture, language, social norms, worldview, educational conventions, communication infrastructure, and technology orientation between the Global North and Global South, where more than 70 percent of international students in the United States come from.

While face-to-face classes allow more opportunities for mutual interaction among students, the format of online classes tends to heighten these differences. Moreover, unprecedented circumstances like the COVID-19 pandemic have led to international travel bans, closure of U.S. embassies, and non-issuance of student visas. Uncertain immigration rules regarding online classes, social isolation, and negative rhetoric targeting immigrants in a charged political environment create conditions that affect the cognitive and emotional state of international students. This issue concerns not just educators and advocates of cross-cultural education, but also national leaders, including those present at the 2021 World Economic Forum.

How Can UX Research Help?

According to usability.gov, "UX focuses on having a deep understanding of users, what they need, what they value, their abilities, and also their limitations." UX includes the entire experience of a user with a product, and by observation, analysis, and feedback, researchers attempt to find out if users found the interaction meaningful and valuable. Thus, to create an inclusive learning environment for international students from the Global South, who are also likely to be non-native speakers of English, online instructors first need to understand their students from the user's perspective. This form of empathy mapping is the first step towards design thinking, which Donald Norman refers to as "spend[ing] time determining what basic, fundamental (root) issue needs to be addressed."

I have presented my research on international students' experience in online classes at conferences, and am currently expanding it to a more comprehensive study through user journey maps, site visits, and emotion assessment. The following UX research methods can help online instructors identify their students' challenges, desires, needs, and capabilities to create a user-centered, inclusive course, and use the appropriate technologies and tools to deliver the class.

Just like knowing your audience is the starting point of any UX research, instructors and program administrators must analyze international students' needs, goals, and motivations to facilitate learning and aid participation.

User Analysis

Just like knowing your audience is the starting point of any UX research, instructors and program administrators must analyze international students' needs, goals, and motivations to facilitate learning and aid participation. While international students are not a homogenous entity—each brings different backgrounds, cultures, languages, technological expertise, and priorities—there are some common elements that can help you create a user profile. If you have an international student in your class, reflect on these questions, or ask the student directly:

- What are the key immigration rules that an instructor, principal investigator, or program administrator needs to know about you as an international student?
- What motivates you, and what is your goal in studying at an American university?
- What is your technological knowledge and skill level?
- Is English your first language, or are you a non-native English speaker?
- Are your cultural norms significantly different from American customs and practices?
- How has COVID-19 affected your cognitive and emotional state?
- Do you have a mentor beyond the class, either on campus or within the program?

The answers will help you make decisions on class policies, instruction delivery, and tools. For example, the Department of Homeland Security says that international "undergraduate students must take at least 12 credit hours per term," and graduate students in most universities have to take at least nine every semester. This adds additional pressure on top of the usual rigors of school; they cannot drop a course or take a gap year. Also, they can only take one online class, something to keep in mind when planning instruction delivery methods. Besides being occupied with a full class load, international students can be very goal-oriented and motivated to succeed, especially after leaving their friends and family for the sake of a better education, and paying high fees compared to schools in their home countries.

Another way of understanding a student's cultural characteristics is by researching their cultural dimensions scores based on a worldwide survey

conducted by social psychologist Gerard Hofstede. These scores should not be used to generalize the population of an entire nation, but rather as a starting point to familiarize ourselves with the needs and expectations of people we have not encountered before. For example, if you have students from "collectivist" and "high power distance" cultures, they may hesitate to participate verbally in class, ask questions, or interrupt anyone because their values are more community-based, with greater emphasis on maintaining hierarchies. To facilitate student engagement, you can allow different forms of participation in your class policy, and encourage use of features like chat, emojis, GIFs, raising hand, polls, breakout rooms, etc. on video conferencing platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Most international students only get a one-day orientation and may not be accustomed to American educational expectations or social etiquette. By being empathetic to their emotional state, linguistic, technological, and cultural differences, you can be an effective mentor.

If students are non-native speakers of English, allow the use of e-dictionaries like Youdao, which offer acoustic translations and screen word recognition to translate words and sentences. Some international students also use dictionary pens and app-based scanners to read books. These steps can help them engage with digital materials. University resources like writing centers can help them review their written work. Lastly, consider adding multimodal assignments like podcasts, speeches, vlogs, graphics, or presentation of artifacts to allow international students to share their culture, and express themselves in non-textual forms dominated by Euro-centric standards.

Consider how far some of these students have travelled to get quality education in an alien environment. Some students can't go home due to travel bans, financial issues, and civil unrest.

Environment Analysis

While international students can be present in the United States, they may also be in their home countries, attending classes from different time zones, sometimes logging into their online classes in the middle of the night. Moreover, as U.S. embassies were closed and international flights were banned during the COVID-19 pandemic, many students were not able to get visas, or enter the United States. In fact, the IIE 2020 report says that one in five international students studied online from abroad in Fall 2020.

When students attend classes from their home countries, their telecommunication infrastructure, technology, and internet options may be different from students in the United States. In his article "Online Education in an Age of Globalization: Foundational Perspectives and Practices for Technical Communication Instructors and Trainers," Kirk St.Amant of Louisiana Tech University also stresses on the importance of factors like access, design, scheduling, and language, which are crucial for successful global online instructional delivery. To understand the learning environment of your international students, ask the following questions:

- Are you located in the United States, or taking classes from your home countries?
- If you are not in the United States, what time zone are you in, and are you aware of U.S. time zones?
- Do you use different date and time formats?
- Do you have access to communication and remote learning technologies?
- How does COVID-19 affect your travel plans, immigration status, class format, and residency requirements?
- What other disruptions are you facing that might affect your learning?

Some of these questions may seem trivial, such as date and time formats, but they can create logistical disruptions if not clarified. In India, I use the date/month format instead of month/date used in the United States, and not all countries follow daylight saving time.

There could be more significant disruptions that are unthinkable in the Global North. For example, riots in my hometown in India in December 2019 led to no internet for more than two weeks. Even when we have Wi-Fi, we may have power outages for hours. I know someone from the Middle East who was unable to attend classes because of air strikes. What seems dramatic to some is a reality for many.

Also, consider how far some of these students have travelled to get quality education in an alien environment. Some students can't go home due to travel bans, financial issues, and civil unrest. After looking forward to going home for five years, COVID-19 travel restrictions have had a profound effect on my mental health. It was the kindness of my professors that helped me cope with this. Empathy and environmental analysis play a vital role in understanding users' cognitive and emotional states.

Task Analysis

According to the Neilsen Norman Group, task analysis is the "broad practice of learning about how users work (i.e., the tasks they perform) to achieve their goals." It can help instructors identify the international students'

goals, outline all the tasks students have to do to meet their goals, and analyze if students faced any barriers in executing any task. To conduct a task analysis, you can draw upon your findings from the user and environment analysis, conduct contextual inquiry to observe the users, or conduct interviews. Here are some questions and talking points to help you analyze tasks:

- What goals does an international student have in terms of the course?
- What key tasks does the student need to perform to meet the goals of a scenario (for example, logging in to the classroom, participating in breakout rooms, etc.)?
- What other tasks do students have to do to meet their goals (for example, muting and unmuting the microphone, sharing their screen, using the chat box, etc.)?
- What errors do students make, if any, and with what frequency?
- Are they able to correct any errors, or did they fail to successfully complete the task?
- How long did it take to complete the task?
- What was their cognitive state (thoughts, decisions) and emotional state (feelings, mood) while performing these tasks?
- Were students able to meet all their goals?
- Did you identify the real problem(s) when users were unable to complete any task?

Task analysis and design are closely related. Once you identify the real problem, you can decide how to design your course on a learning management system, select video conferencing features or collaboration tools, and modify any course policies like participation and attendance, syllabus, and assignment prompts. For example, if an international student is a non-native speaker of English, and is having difficulty in following what you say in class, enable the auto-captioning feature in the video conferencing platform, PowerPoint slides, and lecture videos, along with a transcript that they can read at their own pace. Recording classes helps students who are unable to enter the online class due to power or Wi-Fi failure. Uploading smaller audio files also makes it easier to access in countries with slower internet speed.

Conclusion

User, environment, and task analysis are just some UX research methods that can help you get a more holistic picture of an international and non-native English-speaking student's experience. This, along with an empathetic attitude, lies at the heart of understanding these students and the unique challenges they face, and can help you to design course elements and delivery methods.

Software developers and testers who make learning, collaboration, or communication platforms for a global user market can also incorporate these takeaways in their product research and development. In the early days of the pandemic, I had mentioned at a conference how some of the icons on the Zoom home page could be confusing to international users, and also that they must add more emojis. At the time of writing this article, Zoom has already added new icons and emojis, which shows how responsive they are to the needs of their users.

When educators and decision makers translate diversity and inclusion statements into concrete practices, they send the message that each individual's voice and story matters. Identifying and acknowledging the exclusive challenges faced by marginalized groups, such as international and non-native, English-speaking students, is the one of the first steps towards creating an environment of inclusivity.

MEGHALEE DAS *(Meghalee.Das@ttu.edu) is a PhD student in technical communication and rhetoric at Texas Tech University. She is interested in intercultural technical communication, UX, digital rhetoric, social justice, and inclusive pedagogical practices.*

REFERENCES

Department of Health and Human Services. n.d. "User Experience Basics." Usability.gov. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www.usability.gov/what-and-why/user-experience.html*

Hofstede Insights. "Country Comparison." 2020. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/.*

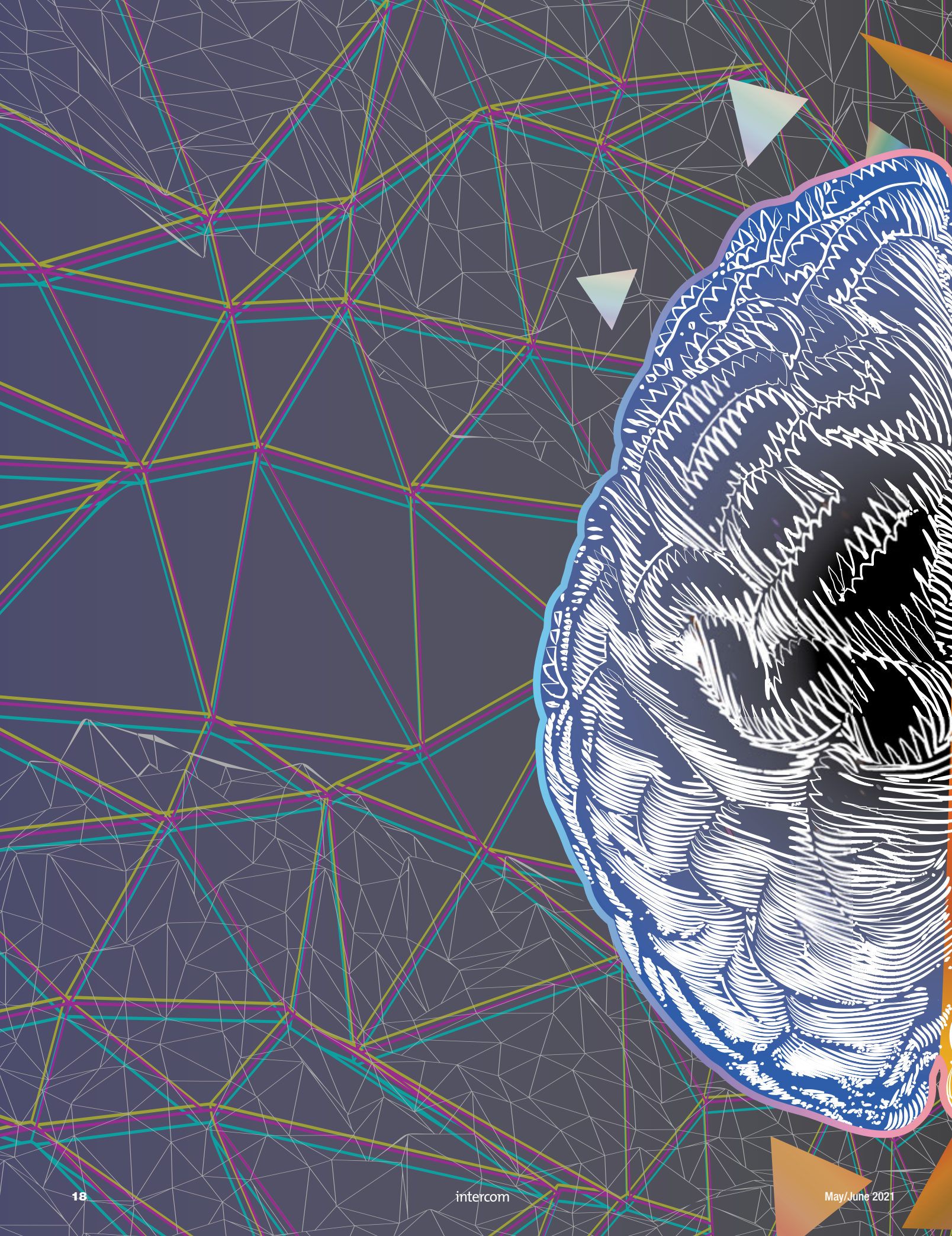
Institute of International Education. "Fall 2020 International Student Enrollment Snapshot Reports," 2020. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Fall-International-Enrollments-Snapshot-Reports.*

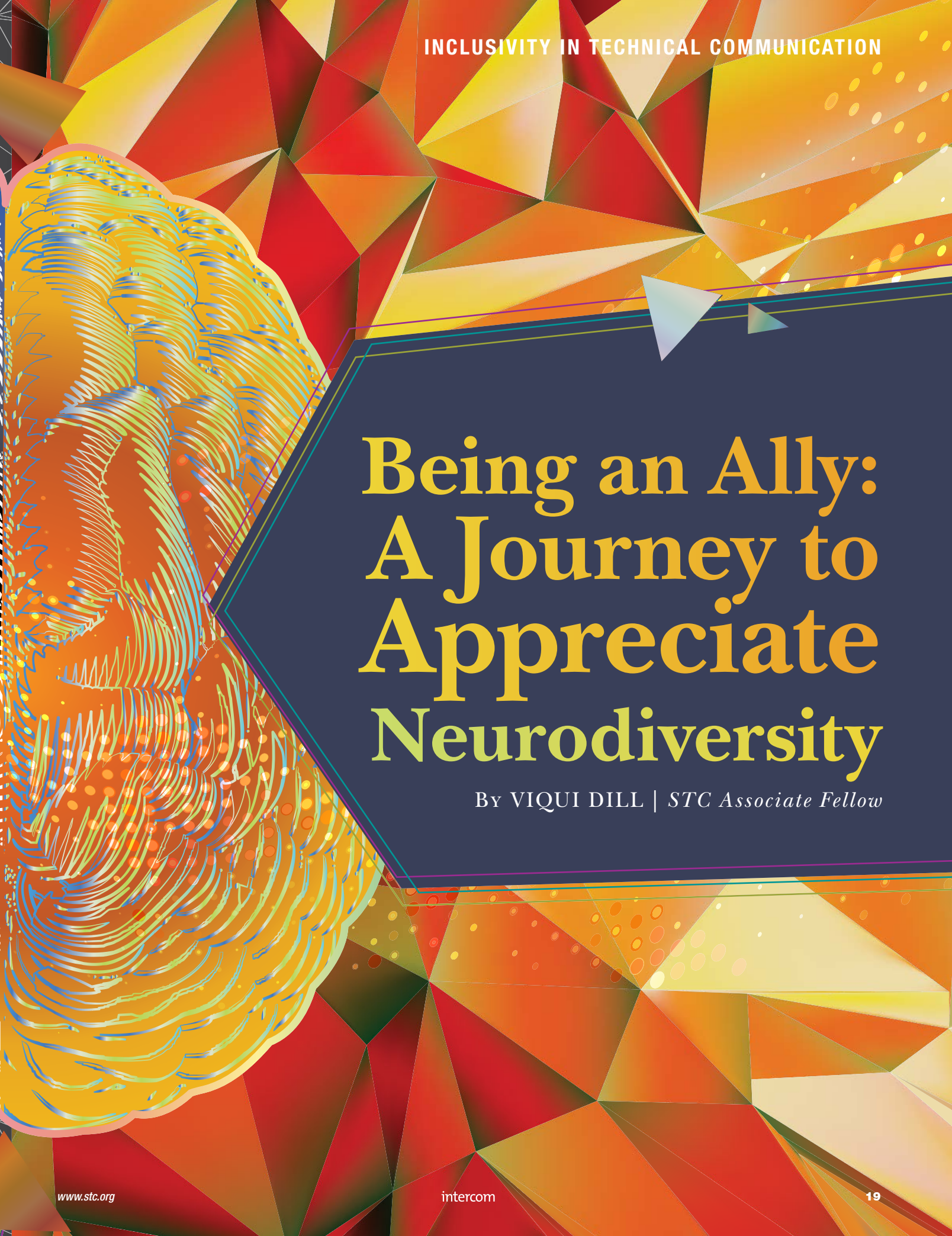
Norman, Donald A. 2013. *The Design of Everyday Things.* New York: Basic Books.

Rosala, Maria. 2020. "Task Analysis: Support Users in Achieving Their Goals." Nielsen Norman Group. Accessed 21 February 2021. *https://www.nngroup.com/articles/task-analysis/.*

St. Amant, Kirk. 2007. "Online Education in an Age of Globalization: Foundational Perspectives and Practices for Technical Communication Instructors and Trainers." *Technical Communication Quarterly* 16, no. 1: 13–30. *https://doi.org/10.1080/10572250709336575.*

Theobald, Rebecca B. 2008. "Internationalization: Institutions, People and Programmes in Colorado." *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 32, no. 2: 205–16. *https://doi.org/10.1080/03098260701731199.*





Being an Ally: A Journey to Appreciate Neurodiversity

By VIQUI DILL | *STC Associate Fellow*

IN THIS ISSUE, we're talking about Inclusivity. STC is striving to be a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization. But what can members do to be better allies of people in underserved groups? There are a number of good ways you can become a better ally. One way is to educate ourselves.

Because my son is on the autism spectrum, I have a special place in my heart for neurodiversity. Neurodiversity is a concept where neurological differences are to be recognized and respected as any other human variation. These differences can include those labeled with dyspraxia, dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autistic spectrum, Tourette syndrome, and others. Neuro-differences are recognized and appreciated as a social category on par with ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, or disability status.

I'm sharing my story because I truly believe that allyship is a growing process. We don't start as allies. When we know better, we can do better. Here is one look at allyship through the lens of my experience with my neurodiverse son.

When we know better, we can do better.

Understanding the Needs of a Neurodiverse Child

When my son was first diagnosed with autism, I remember thinking of the condition as my greatest enemy. I devoted every waking moment to combatting and conquering it, shedding tears, saying prayers, and spending my retirement savings on therapies and treatments—not to change who Jim was, but to give him the best possible tools for long-term success.

As you might imagine, it's not easy to be a neurodiverse child. I'll let Jim explain it in his own words: "Children can pick up upon cues that indicate who is not quite right. There were two kids in particular who loved bullying me. Their love of tormenting me started small but got worse every year. And of course, everyone faces school yard bullies. Faced with tormenters both in school and out of it, I became withdrawn. I had fewer friends as time went on. "

Now, let me explain that I am glad that we did invest so much time, energy, and money in the interventions that allowed our son to get along in a neurotypical world. We began with weekly speech therapy that improved his verbal skills and reduced emotional outbursts when he couldn't make himself understood. We took occupational therapy to help him find satisfying ways to get proprioceptive stimulation, eliminating the hand flapping that made him look strange. We experimented with a controversial allergy treatment that improved his behavior by improving how he felt inside. We invested in another controversial treatment that adjusted his overly sensitive hearing that allowed him to start using his hearing normally and be more in tune with the world around him. We homeschooled throughout all of middle school, breaking the cycle of fight or flight that had plagued his previous school years. All of these interventions brought him closer to our world and helped him enjoy being a part of it.

Neurodiversity in Adults

Now that my son is an adult, I see autism as just another characteristic that makes Jim uniquely Jim. Like his thick curly hair and his deep baritone voice, Jim owns his autism and uses it to his advantage. I have learned to appreciate the neurodiversity in our home.

Some of the autistic characteristics have turned out to be assets. Jim has an ability to concentrate and focus that is unmatched. This comes in handy in a musical home and he is able to go about his business despite the loud rehearsal that is happening in the basement. Jim sees it differently. "My mother seems to think that what I have is some kind of superpower, that it grants me talents normal people do not have. But my talents are not unique to my condition."

The social detachment that comes with autism keeps Jim's life drama free. He never gets in a twist about what someone says or what someone thinks about him. He just lets it go in a way we all wish we could.

And best of all, the repetitive behaviors that doctors label "perseveration" make Jim a fantastic percussionist. Jim picked up his drumming technique in a single lesson back in 2004 and has been drumming with our family band ever since. He is able to make the same repetitive motions for hours during a gig, singing at the same time, without skipping a beat or varying tempo. He is also a strong rhythm guitar player for the same reason.

Our family band, The Dill Pickers, played at #STC20 and will be performing at some of the regional conferences as well. Come sing and dance along and say hi to our neurodiverse family. Links to our performance videos are available in the references.

Neurodiversity and Employment

Neurodiversity is starting to be recognized as a competitive advantage. In a 2017 article in the *Harvard Business Review,* Robert D. Austin and Gary P. Paisano

point out that "A growing number of prominent companies have reformed their HR processes in order to access neurodiverse talent." These companies include SAP, Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE), Microsoft, Willis Towers Watson, Ford, and EY.

Why? Austin and Paisano say that neurodiverse hires bring new perspectives:

> "At HPE, neurodiverse software testers observed that one client's projects always seemed to go into crisis mode before a launch. Intolerant of disorder, they strenuously questioned the company's apparent acceptance of the chaos. This led the client company to realize that it had indeed become too tolerant of these crises and, with the help of the testers, to successfully redesign the launch process. At SAP, a neurodiverse customer-support analyst spotted an opportunity to let customers help solve a common problem themselves; thousands of them subsequently used the resources he created."

It's not surprising, then, that the tech sector is where many of the hiring initiatives exist. Many people with autism thrive in professions like coding, programming, software testing, and analytics—professions that benefit from the ability to concentrate and focus.

But of course, those skills are useful in other industries, as David Kearon, the Director of Adult Services with Autism Speaks notes in a 2020 article on WorkingNation.com: "The reasons why tech environments seem like such a good fit for people with autism—they tend to be predictable, systematic, and rule-based—also apply to many other occupations as well."

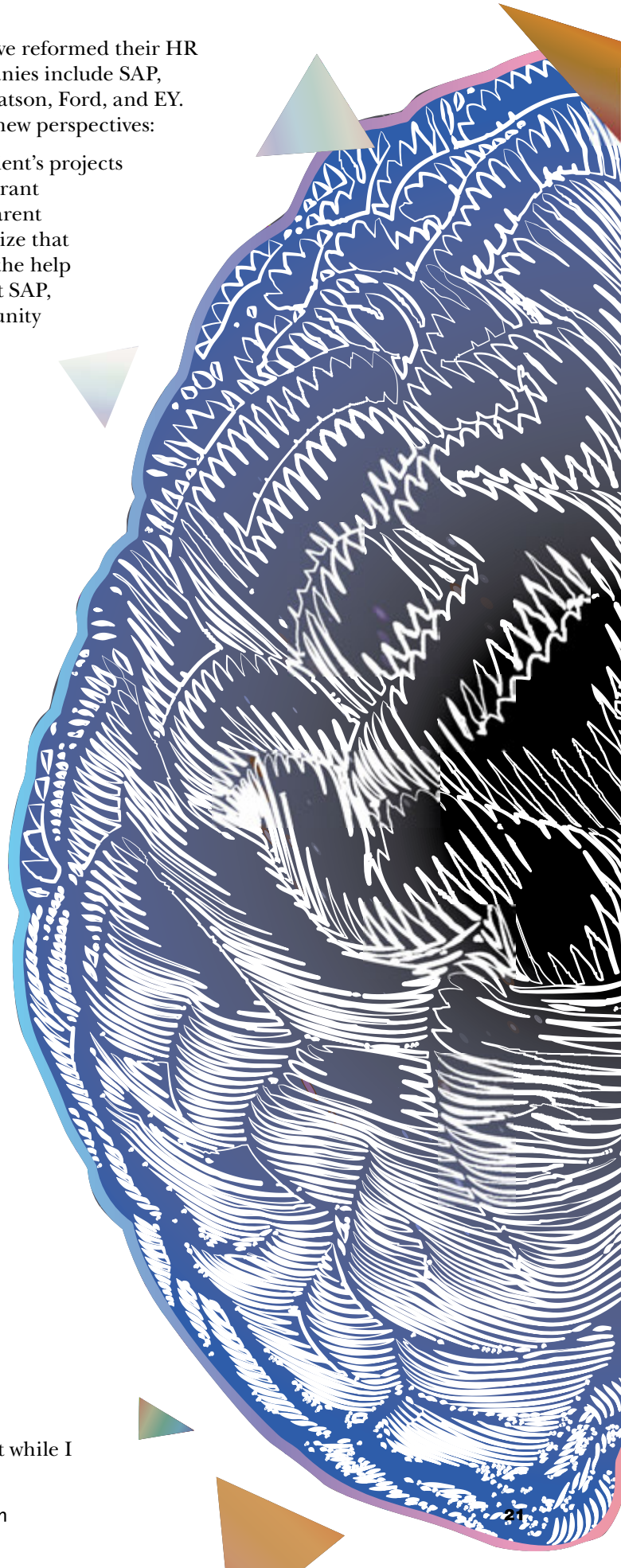
Austin and Paisano report that SAP—the organization with the oldest program for neurodiversity—has seen productivity gains, quality improvement, increases in innovation, and improvements in employee engagement. HPE South Pacific, an organization with one of the largest neurodiversity programs, sees significant benefits from neurodiverse hires. No other initiative delivers benefits at so many levels, according to Nick Wilson, managing director.

"Perhaps the most surprising benefit is that managers have begun thinking more deeply about leveraging the talents of *all* employees through greater sensitivity to individual needs," observe Austin and Paisano.

As for Jim, he has a good job with full benefits as a government contractor at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) in Kearneysville, West Virginia. The job is through NW Works, our local 501(c)(3) non-profit that bridges the employment gap for people with disabilities and others facing barriers to meaningful employment. Information for NW Works is available in the references.

Jim is thriving at his new job and blends in so well that his supervisor actually asked for a doctor's note confirming his diagnosis.

"My autism is not a malady that is immediately obvious," Jim explains. "But once you introduce yourself, you may notice that while I



meet your smile with my own, while I reach out my hand to shake yours, you will notice something off, but you may not know what precisely that is. Maybe it's the way my gaze almost, but not quite, meets yours, or that it meets it only briefly, then moves to something else. You are witnessing a mask of sanity, one built upon a decade of intensive therapy and lots of medications. It is a facade that almost resembles the psyche of a normal person. Almost..."

'Diversity gives you access to a greater range of talent, not just the talent that belongs to a particular worldview or ethnicity or some other restricting definition,' explains Meir Shemla, Associate Professor at the Rotterdam School of Management.

Conclusion

Meaningful employment is so important and it's great to see employers like the USDA making room for neurodiverse workers. My hope is that this trend continues, particularly as companies like SAP share their positive experiences with neurodiverse hiring.

"Diversity gives you access to a greater range of talent, not just the talent that belongs to a particular worldview or ethnicity or some other restricting definition," explains Meir Shemla, Associate Professor at the Rotterdam School of Management in an article for *Forbes*. "It helps provide insight into the needs and motivations of all of your client or customer base, rather than just a small part of it. And, potentially, as McKinsey & Co. and a host of other highly credible researchers have shown, it makes your organization more effective, more successful, more profitable."

We need to make room for a more diverse workforce. Having more voices and perspectives benefits everyone.

VIQUI DILL *(viqui.dill@gmail.com) is a technical writer and editor for Huntington Ingalls Industries, living in Winchester, Virginia, and working in Kearneysville, West Virginia. She is passionate about continued education and lifelong learning for those in our field. Sharing the tips and tricks she has gathered in her 25 years as a writer, she is actively promoting networking with other writers to help us all learn and stay connected. Dill plays bass with STC's own Rough Drafts band and her family band, The Dill Pickers, performed at the 2020 virtual STC Summit. Dill describes herself as a "technical writer, wife and mom, bass player, and worship leader. I'm happiest when folks sing along with me."*

REFERENCES

The Dill Pickers. 26 May 2020. "Dill Pickers are so happy to have been a part of the #STC20 Summit Honors celebration and after party. Congratulations to all the honorees of the well-deserved awards. Many thanks to all my STC and the exchange friends who attended. Music starts about 52 minutes in." [Facebook update]. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www.facebook.com/Dill.Pickers/posts/10158112025049933.*

NW Works. n.d. "Empowerment Through Employment." Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://nwworks.com/.*

Pisano, Gary, P. May-June 2017. "Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage." *Harvard Business Review.* Accessed 7 April. 2021. *https://hbr.org/2017/05/neurodiversity-as-a-competitive-advantage.*

Schindelheim, Ramona.2020. " Closing the Neurodiversity Gap in the Workplace." WorkingNation. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://workingnation.com/closing-the-neurodiversity-gap-in-the-workplace/.*

Shemla, Meir. 2018. "Why Workplace Diversity is So Important, and Why It's So Hard to Achieve." *Forbes.* Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www.forbes.com/sites/rsmdiscovery/2018/08/22/why-workplace-diversity-is-so-important-and-why-its-so-hard-to-achieve/?sh=4a5c35823096.*

STC South Central Texas Chapter.n.d." STC SoCenTx 2021 MiniConference." Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://stc-socentx.org /stc-socentx-2021-miniconference/.*

UNITE YOUR TECH COMM TEAM WITH

STC's Corporate Value Program

Corporate Value Program (CVP) membership enables organizations to purchase a package of individual memberships for your entire tech comm team, at an overall discounted rate. Companies are eligible to join as a CVP member with a team of five or more technical communicators. When your company invests in a CVP membership, each employee enrolled receives industry tips, tool trainings, professional development, networking opportunities, and other high-quality resources. It's a win-win for your company and your entire team!

Ready to enroll?

Complete the online application at **www.stc.org/membership/corporate-value-program**

Perks of all CVP memberships:

- No new member enrollment fee
- Memberships are transferable to new employees when one leaves your company
- Discounted job posting rates on STC's Job Bank: For a 10% discount, use the code: STCCVP
- Opportunity to sponsor a member-only live webinar (additional costs may be involved)
- Opportunity to participate as a presenter in STC's Technical Communication Summit conference sessions, or as a contributor in STC's Notebook blog and *Intercom* magazine articles
- Discounted rates on advertising, email blasts, and exhibit space at STC's annual conference
- Buy five live webinars for company employees and receive the sixth for free.

Intention is the Antidote to Exclusion and Inequity

By SHAWNEDA CROUT | *STC Member*

THE WORKFORCE IN America has been diverse since the first slave ship landed in Virginia; building equity and inclusion within our diverse population has required more of a conscious effort. Descendants of African slaves have been employed in lower-level jobs for less pay, with little to no opportunity for advancement, and treated poorly since the abolishment of slavery.

Slavery was an intentional choice made for economic advancement built on the intentional dehumanization of the enslaved. Journals, diaries, and slave logs show the mindset of many who felt the need to explain that their ownership of "others" who were darker were inferior, in order to excuse themselves. These lies led to the dehumanization and demoralization of the slaves. Introducing these ideologies into the fabric of American culture during its formative years has made the treatment of those of African descent as "less than"—a perception that has been acceptable or encouraged since our arrival in Virginia. Ripping this thread from our construction must be done with precision, delicacy, and intention. But it can be done.

Making a Conscious Effort

Journals, diaries, and logs of abolitionists show that the work of abolishing slavery began the same day the first slave ship landed in Virginia. Someone of European descent was appalled by the thought of making people of African descent work without pay to create economic gain. Hundreds of research papers have been written, countless conspiracy theories birthed and debunked, and a few theories proven. Slave owners with a crisis of conscience, trapped between building a legacy of wealth and the recognition of their slaves, might set them free upon death. The unintentional consequences of the evils inherent in building wealth using slave labor in America have spread from complicating the relationship between descendants of slave owners and descendants of African slaves to the way descendants of African slaves in America are viewed by all ethnicities.

Eradicating the devaluation, discrimination, and pervasive negative attitudes toward descendants of African slaves will not be easy. Legislation and political action with consistent consequences is one small part of

the solution. That legislation will be led by the adoption of different behaviors and attitudes by individuals. This pattern is demonstrated in the legislative improvements that have been enacted to reverse other "isms" in American society. Reversing the negative impact of slavery on every American citizen will require an intentional plan with specific, measurable actions, with fiduciary goals tied to positive results. Tying the benefits of acting with intention to reverse systemic racism in America has to be tied to financial gain for any modicum of acceptance, widespread participation, and hope for success.

Resolving the problem of discrimination, representation, inclusion, and equity won't happen as a natural process of selection. CNBC reports that up to 80 percent of positions are filled through networking—the circle of people that you know and recommend. If your professional circle looks just like you in terms of gender, race, and sexual orientation, then it's likely that your hiring will reflect that.

Inclusion by Intent

Everyone involved in being a part of making the goal of inclusion and equity must be intentional. We must be intentional about being honest with ourselves, about how we can take part and why. Anti-racists and allies must be consistently intentional about deciding to take the small, uncomfortable steps toward changing environments, so the once-accepted behaviors are no longer accepted.

If your professional circle looks just like you in terms of gender, race, and sexual orientation, then it's likely that your hiring will reflect that.

African Americans must work with those engaged for more than ethical motivations. We must be able to recognize when we've exhausted our capacities and need to address the consequences of living in this environment. When necessary, we must be intentional about seeking professional help to work through the emotional pain so we can continue to be a productive part of the solution.

Simultaneous engagement of those driven by profit, open to change, and already doing DEI work will be the most successful way forward. Focusing on the tangible benefits will be necessary to accomplish inclusion and equity that benefits the descendants of African slaves as much as it has benefited women of European descent and other ethnicities with more representation in executive management in technical communications

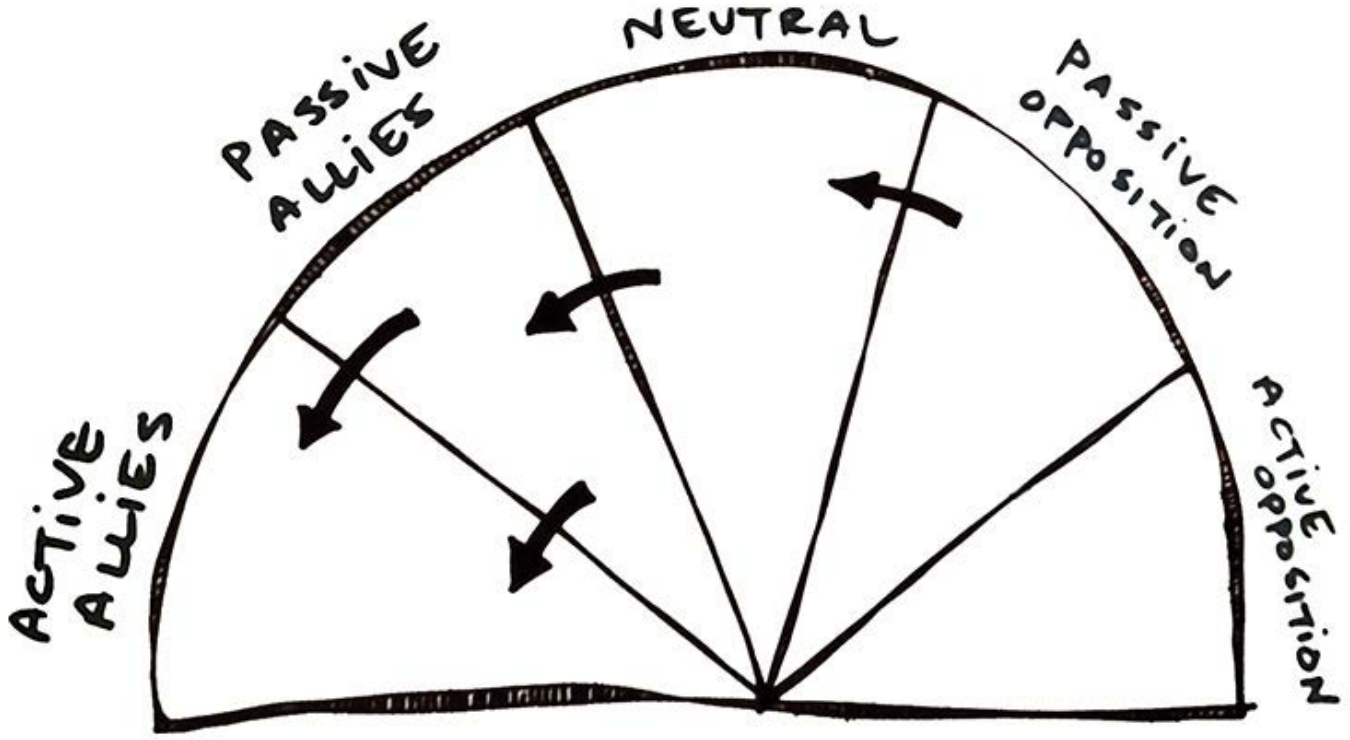


Figure 1. The Spectrum of Allies

and all of corporate America. Long-term, intentional personal and professional action by anti-racists, allies, and people of African descent with the ability to effect change is another part of the equation being formulated.

Overcoming Negative Stereotypes

Stereotypes go both ways. Negative stereotypes about those of African descent like laziness, stupidity, and a biological bend toward depravity originated from slavery—stereotypes that have continued to be perpetuated to this day, in certain sections of American society. Ironically, these same negative stereotypes have been expressed by the descendants of African slaves about the slave owners and their descendants with an additional belief their greed makes them inherently evil. Owning slaves to do work for them to become richer made them—not the slave—lazy. Believing a person they owned would ever stop wanting to be free made them stupid. Is anything more depraved than treating humans like stock, driving them with whips to work, breeding them like horses to increase productivity, or worse—making money by selling their children?

Some American citizens will never acknowledge the impact of what happened. The reasons for not wanting to do so are as varied as the cultures, ethnicities, and ideologies now present in America and our workforce.

Being an Ally

Inclusivity and equity are achievable by deciding to consistently refute inherent bias built into American society. For anti-racists and allies, this can be as simple as questioning the validity of statements that are built on the acceptable dehumanization practices called "microaggressions" and incessant diminishing of descendants of African slaves. The following is an example of how to do this in an everyday setting on a social media platform like LinkedIn.

An interesting article about eliminating "unconscious bias" catches your eye on LinkedIn. You're thinking about clicking on the link to read it and notice a comment. The comment says, "This is reverse discrimination. I shouldn't be forced to hire someone who isn't qualified." Responding to this comment in a professional, intentional way that exposes how it reinforces inherent and unconscious bias that has been tolerated at best and adopted at worst questions the validity of the statement. An anti-racist would point out the bias and racist undertone of the comment by saying something like this:"You can't be forced to hire anyone. Why do you assume if you hire someone that isn't white and male they aren't qualified?" An ally who isn't comfortable addressing racism head on can use a reverse passive microaggression. "You shouldn't. No one should be forced to hire someone unqualified. More importantly, no one should have to work for someone unable to see them as capable of contributing positively to the company."

To successfully remove the thread of systemic racism and diminished valuation of the descendants of African slaves from the fabric of our country, we need as many people on board as possible. The Spectrum of Allies tool is one example of how to shift the focus. We often think of social change as having two camps: those who seek change, and those who don't. The reality is more nuanced. The majority of individuals fall into a middle ground. As we see in the figure below, our goal as active allies is not to move the active opposition across the full spectrum, but rather to move each group one step towards allyship to achieve critical mass for change.

Wasting time on those who don't want to take part is an exercise in futility. Welcoming and engaging those interested in being a part of the solution is a better choice. Each person interested in being part of the solution, regardless of ancestry, must first acknowledge their own unconscious biases. Hiring managers, business owners, practitioners, and technical communicators must be intentional about not buying into the negative stereotypes inherited by the descendants of slaves of African descent, slave owners, or those who have assimilated into American culture. This is the first step.

Wasting time on those who don't want to take part is an exercise in futility. Welcoming and engaging those interested in being a part of the solution is a better choice.

What's in It for Me?

The average person is more likely to get involved when things benefit them and those they care about on a personal level. Anti-racists and allies care about improving the fabric of American society, but a great deal more people aren't racist and also won't change their behavior unless it benefits them. Persuading someone who is indifferent to how the descendants of African slaves have been dealing with the negative daily impact of systemic racism and accepted diminished valuation for centuries to care could take several centuries. Instead, we need to frame the discussion within themes that resonate for them.

For some people, financial independence and profit are most important. Being intentional about realizing the negative daily impact of systemic racism on all Americans and how much it costs America financially must be the start and finish of the conversation. Persuading someone indifferent to help to change the narrative about racism in America to get involved because it will benefit everyone will be easier and has a likelier chance of success based on human behavior. Disheartening as this may be initially by those intrinsically invested in making this happen, embracing the truth helps each person dedicated to achieving inclusion and equity move forward toward the goal.

"The case for establishing a truly diverse workforce, at all organizational levels, grows more compelling each year," explains Vijay Eswaran, Executive Chairman of the QI Group of Companies in an article for the World Economic Forum. "The moral argument is weighty enough, but the financial impact—as proven by multiple studies—makes this a no-brainer."

Each person living in America has been shaped by the messaging we received. Our belief systems are built by inherence, inference, and direct instruction. The environment where we're parented and educated, and our individual personalities inform how we respond to the information we receive. As descendants of African slaves in America, unless our melanin content and hair make passing as something else possible, we can't escape the direct impact of systemic racism. We don't have the collective ability to end the current culture that presents dehumanizing and demoralizing representation of African Americans while choosing not to show the same images of other ethnicities, but we can choose how we respond. African Americans who descended from slaves who choose to take part in the slow, methodical dismantling of systemic racism must be intentional about rejecting the dehumanizing and demoralizing stereotypes we've been taught, to recognize the efforts of anti-racists and allies. We must extend the same grace and understanding for those trying to navigate the murky waters of unity that we hope to receive when the fabric of our country is healed. We have to understand the right to choose to take part to course correct our economy by those motivated by personal benefit without taking it as a personal attack or internalizing it as diminished valuation.

Hope for the Future

There is hope for an intentional, inclusive future. Three-quarters of respondents in the Deloitte Millennial Survey believe that organizations are more innovative when they foster a culture of inclusion. As this group ascends to more management roles, there is hope that their hiring practices will reflect increasing racial equity and inclusion.

No one culture or ethnicity will resolve the problem of equity and inclusion in technical communications or corporate America. Everyone who wants to be a part of the solution must be honest with themselves about their motivation, capacity, and intention to work together for as long as it takes to make it happen.

SHAWNEDA CROUT *(sc@shawneda.com) is a self-employed technical communicator. Crout has launched social media communications programs across multiple industries ranging from a family-owned crane and hoist manufacturer to a faith-based nonprofit. Her passion for words grew from publishing fiction novels to earning a Master of Arts in English, Technical Communication where she was introduced to STC as a student member. When she's not creating solutions where technical communication merges with marketing, you can find her doing low impact exercises with her daughter or publishing her books.*

REFERENCES

Bowman, Dannielle & Bailey, Anne C. n.d. "The 1619 Project." *The New York Times Magazine*. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html.*

Deloitte. 2020. The Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2020. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www2.deloitte.com/global/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/millennialsurvey.html.*

Eswaran, Vijay. 2019. "The Business Case for Diversity in the Workplace is Now Overwhelming." *World Economic Forum*. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/04/business-case-for-diversity-in-the-workplace/*

Freeland Fisher, Julia. 2019. "How to Get a Job Often Comes Down to One Elite Personal Asset, and Many People Still Don't Realize It." CNBC. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www.cnbc.com/2019/12/27/how-to-get-a-job-often-comes-down-to-one-elite-personal-asset.html.*

Trainings. n.d. "Spectrum of Allies." Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://trainings.350.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/spectrumofallies-1.png.*

30
100
50

TIPS TO IMPROVE Document Accessibility

By CHAR JAMES-TANNY

"KEEP OUT!" "STAY AWAY." "Do not enter!"

When faced with accessibility issues, these are the messages that people with disabilities (PWD) receive.

- A person in a wheelchair in front of a building with only steps. ("But they're small steps!")
- A non-verbal person who uses an iPad to order at Starbucks. ("Can't you just tell me what you want?")
- A person who is deaf watching a video without captions.
- A person who is blind watching a video and hearing only music.
- A person who uses the keyboard, not a mouse, only to discover that they can't navigate through a PDF or web page.
- A person who uses a screen reader to read a PDF or web page, only to discover that there are no headings styles or tags for navigation and no alt text to explain why images are included.

These situations and more happen daily to PWD around the world (and sometimes to people who don't consider themselves disabled or those who aren't disabled).

As technical communicators, we can't make buildings more accessible. Our power is in our documents, whether they are Word or FrameMaker docs, PDFs, web pages, instruction cards, embedded Help in an application, or any other products that we create. We can also influence software and hardware developers to make products more accessible.

Our goal should be to make our documents usable by everyone.

Accessibility Means Usability

Accessibility means making products usable by anyone. Curb cuts, introduced in the 1940s, made it possible for WWII veterans to get from the street to the sidewalk. Now curb cuts are used by everyone: people pushing strollers or dragging wheelie suitcases, people with arthritic knees or who have had their knees replaced, and more.

Our goal should be to make our documents usable by everyone. While it's best to incorporate accessibility from the beginning, that's usually not possible when introducing accessibility to your co-workers, development teams, and management. Retrofitting accessibility is possible but it takes longer (and costs more) than starting with accessibility in mind.

In addition, anything you do to improve accessibility for PWD also makes the product easier to use by people without disabilities.

The following are some tips for incorporating accessibility in your documents now.

Select Your Color Palette to Meet Contrast Ratios

Contrast ratios are determined by the difference in luminance between two adjacent or overlaid colors. The numbers range from 1 to 21. For example, the contrast ratio for white-on-black is 21 to 1; for black-on-black, 1 to 1; for white-on-white, 21 to 21.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) define contrast ratios to make sure that people with colorblindness can perceive the content. If you are sighted and have ever viewed a web page that uses light gray text in 9-point Arial on a white background, you might understand why this is important.

WCAG defines the criterion for contrast as 7 to 1 for text and images of text and 4.5 to 1 for large text. (WCAG includes two criteria: Minimum and Enhanced. These ratios meet the definition for enhanced.)

You can calculate the contrast ratios with an equation but it's easier to use one of the free contrast ratio analyzers. I prefer The Paciello Group's Colour Contrast Analyser, a free app that I've installed on my laptop because it includes a color picker and several options for selecting how the colors are defined:

- Hexadecimal
- RGB (red, green, blue)
- HSL (hue, saturation, lightness)
- HSV (hue, saturation, value; also known as HSB for hue, saturation, brightness)

After you've decided the colors that will be included in your document, verify that the contrast ratios meet WCAG guidelines.

Then, update all templates to use the new color combinations.

Note: You might run into issues with your company's branding department. The fact is that companies have to choose between meeting the branding guidelines and making their products accessible. It's better for companies to rebrand.

Structure Your Document

Use heading styles or elements when creating your document. Typically, technical communicators do this routinely, but people who don't understand styles sometimes manually format content to look like a heading. (And then we let the application generate the table of contents for us, based on heading styles.)

Make sure that every document has only one Heading 1, typically the title, which identifies the top level of the document for screen readers. Use other heading styles, as necessary. If your document uses numbered headings, make sure that they are hierarchical.

Screen reader users can pull up a list of headings in the document and skim them like sighted people do. Also, heading styles help people with cognitive issues identify how important the section is.

Also, make sure to use:

- Simple tables, without merged cells, and set the top row to repeat across pages. Screen readers can interpret this information and screen reader users then know which column is being read, based on the header row content.
- List styles so that screen readers accurately report the list. For example, this list would be reported as "list with two items."

Add "Alt" Text to Images and More

Back in the old days (with slow modems), people would disable images from appearing in their browsers because they took so long to download. "alt" ("alternative") text let people know what the intent of the image was, and they could decide if they really wanted to look at it.

Now, with faster connection speeds, this purpose is less likely to be needed in most of the world. However, "alt" text helps screen reader users understand what the image is about. You can also add "alt" text to tables and other objects in Microsoft Word.

The "alt" text should describe the intent of what the image is conveying, based on the context of the surrounding text. For example, the alt text for an image

of the Mona Lisa needs to align with why the image was used. Is the document describing the Louvre and where this portrait can be found? Is it describing the brush strokes that Leonardo da Vinci used? Is it part of a collection of da Vinci paintings?

If an image is decorative (that is, it makes the page look nice for sighted users but has no other benefit), include blank "alt" text (that is, alt="").

If the image cannot be loaded (for example, if the image cannot be found), the "alt" text appears.

Finally, search engines use "alt" text when crawling sites.

Be sure to describe the image in as much detail as possible but keep it short (under 125 characters). If you need to provide more information, include it in the surrounding text. You don't need to include "image of" as part of the "alt" text.

For example, which sample "alt" text provides a better description?

- Teenage boy.
- Teenage boy with long blond curly hair.
- Teenage boy with long blond curly hair holding a paint roller with dark green paint in front of a wall with both brown and dark green paint on it.

If you are posting to Facebook, Twitter, or other social media platforms, you can add "alt" text. What I usually do is transcribe the images so that people who can't read them, for whatever reason, know what the content is.

Whenever possible, use a screen reader and listen to what you wrote. Screen readers need context to pronounce words correctly.

Add Captions to Videos

People who are deaf rely on captions to understand what they're watching, whether it's a movie, a tennis match, or the evening news.

People who aren't deaf but are in situations where they can't hear are also able to take advantage of this. For example, if I'm watching TV and skimming through Twitter, I might watch a video with captions. (I never watch videos without them, at least in that situation.)

Better yet, add a transcript and audio description so that people can decide what they are most comfortable with. You can find videos on YouTube that include audio description; I've included an example from *The Lion King* in the reference section at the end of the article.

And if you really want to make your videos accessible, add sign language interpreters. See the When Will I Get My Refund explanation from the IRS, which has information that everyone can use. Disney produced Show Yourself (from Frozen 2), which includes both captions and a sign language interpreter.

Write Right…err, Correctly

"We should not write so that it is possible for [the reader] to understand us, but so that it is impossible for him to misunderstand us."–Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (c. 35 – c. 100), Book VII, 2, line 24

English can be confusing. We have words with multiple meanings that are, in some cases, pronounced differently.

- The bandage was wound around the wound.
- The farm was used to produce produce.
- The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.
- Follow the following steps.
- After a number of injections, my jaw got number.

What we should do to avoid these issues:

- Maintain consistency.
- Define acronyms, abbreviations, and initialisms.
- Use active voice, present tense, "you," and "singular they."
- Avoid idioms and slang.
- Use lists correctly (numbers for tasks or where the order matters; bullets for options where the order is not important).
- Keep sentences between 20 and 30 words and keep paragraphs to one-to-three sentences. Avoid redundancy, such as "actual plan," "adequate enough," or "merge together."

Whenever possible, use a screen reader and listen to what you wrote. Screen readers need context to pronounce words correctly. For example, many websites now include "skip links," which allow screen readers to jump from the top of the page to the content. This link used to be "skip to content," except screen readers read it as "con-'tent.'" Now it's worded skip to main content," which pronounces the word correctly.

And after you decide which words you will use for your documents, create a style guide, verify it for accessibility, and make sure that everyone uses it. For example, decide if you will use the verb "follow" or the adjective

"following," but not both. (This results in "Follow these steps," if the sentence even has to be included.)

Navigate by Keyboard

Make sure that you can navigate PDFs and websites by keyboard. Tab should take you from link to link, in order.

Verify that there aren't any keyboard traps. A "trap" is when you can use a key to get into a field, but you can't use a key to get out. This is found more often in applications but can occur in PDFs with form fields.

Spend a part of each day navigating only by keyboard while you're working. This helps you find instances that don't work as expected.

And open a PowerPoint deck and try to navigate by keyboard. If the master slides are set up incorrectly, the tab order might jump from the page title to the footer, to the slide number, to an image, and then to the content. The tab order can also get messed up if additional objects were added when the slides were created.

Note: When using keyboard navigation for PowerPoint slides, the tab order will be used, not the visual order. If necessary, rearrange the tab order for the master slides, and then rearrange the tab order for individual slides where more objects were added.

Create Useful Links

Web pages full of links that say "click here" are pretty much useless. People who use screen readers can pull up a list of links, which removes them from the context where they're used. Sighted people who skim a document or web page must then read the surrounding content to determine where the link goes.

It's more helpful to create links that indicate exactly where the link will go. Which would you prefer if you only had a list of links?

- "Click here" or "Read about accessibility at Schneider Electric"?
- "Click here" or "Get today's weather"?
- "Click here" or "Visit the STC Summit page"?

You can help all readers by not creating links that open in a new tab. People can use Ctrl+click to open links in a new tab if they want. If all links open in a new tab, people end up with multiple tabs, and depending on the person's browser settings, they might not get notified. (Unless I really have to read something on sites that do that, like when my son was in high school, I never visit the site again if links always open in new tabs.)

Opening in new tabs can result in confusion and the Back button or command usually doesn't return to the previous page.

Creating New Documents

Before you start new documents, be sure to use the same color palette. Create templates for your documents in Microsoft Word and PowerPoint so that the correct colors are used, and the font families and sizes are defined.

Be sure to follow your style guide!

Conclusion

These tips will help you make your current documents and web pages more accessible and help you prepare to create new documents.

CHAR JAMES-TANNY *(charjtf@gmail.com) is a principal technical writer for Process Automation Technical Publications at Schneider Electric, where she focuses on moving existing documents from FrameMaker to DITA. She's also involved in Schneider Electric's accessibility initiative.*

REFERENCES

DisneyMusicVEVO. 2020. "Show Yourself (From "Frozen 2"/American Sign Language Version)." YouTube. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ywnOWWfOWM.*

IRSvideosASL. 2021. "ASL: When Will I Get My Refund? (Captions & Audio)." YouTube. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LstwbSg2eaY.*

Jane Doe. 2016. "Audio Description- Full Clip." YouTube. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-XOHN2BWG4.*

The Paciello Group. n.d. "Colour Contrast Analyser." Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www.tpgi.com/color-contrast-checker/.*

Web Accessibility Initiative. n.d. "Web Content Accessibility Guidelines." Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/.*

The Pen is **Mightier**

Than the Brain

Plain Language and Clear Design Improve Usability for All

By DAVID DYLAN THOMAS

THE FOLLOWING IS an excerpt adapted from the book Design for Cognitive Bias *by David Dylan Thomas, available now from A Book Apart.*

Let's say you need to get from Elwyn, Pennsylvania, to Jefferson Station in downtown Philadelphia. Take a glance at a SEPTA regional rail schedule. Literally, just glance at it. Don't actually read it.

Now, how hard do you think it'll be to get to Jefferson Station using SEPTA?

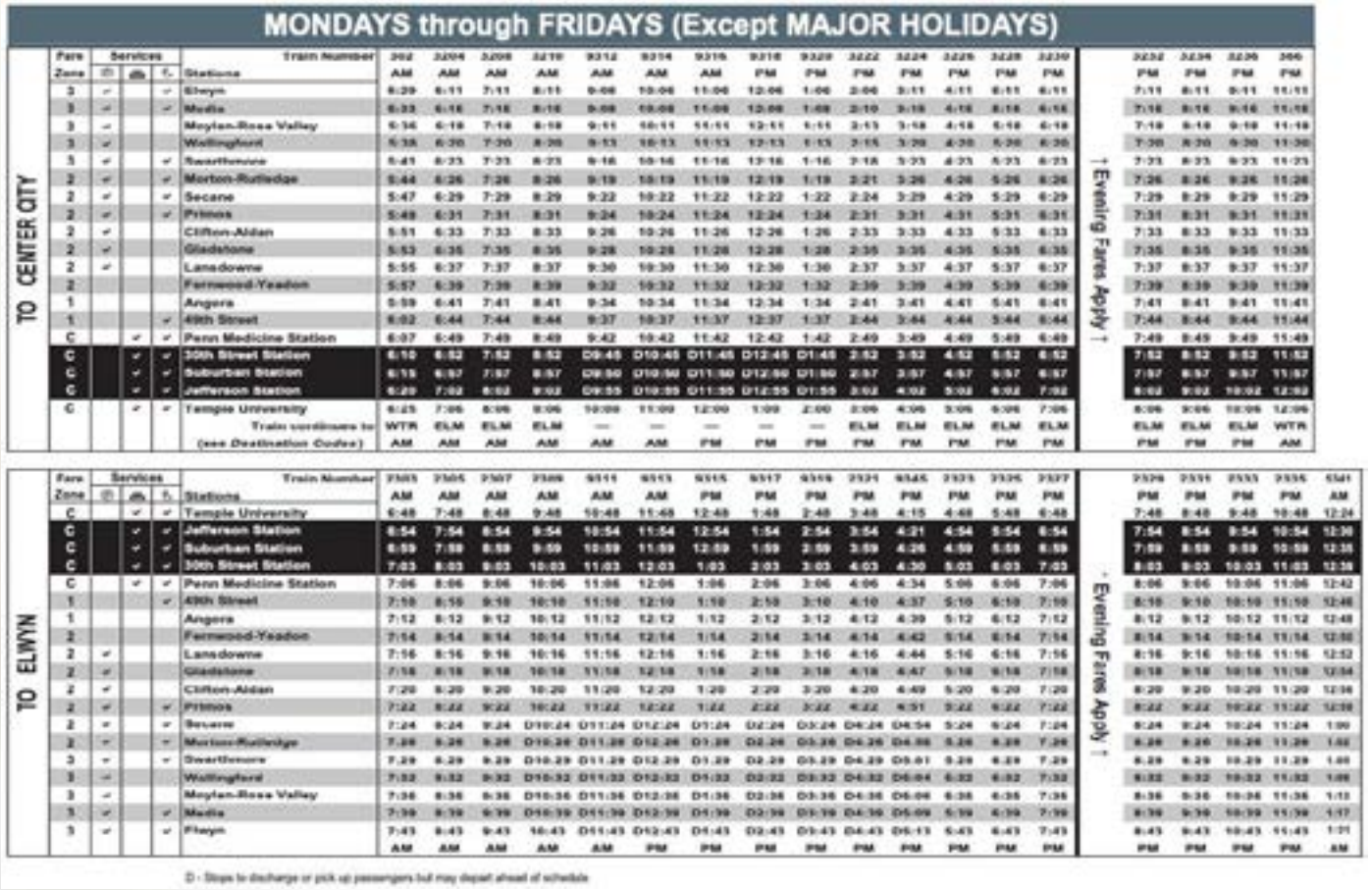


Figure 1. SEPTA regional rail schedule

Next, glance equally quickly at the schedule interface for the SEPTA app.

Now how hard do you think it'll be to get to Jefferson Station?

Taking public transportation suddenly seems way easier. That's because of a phenomenon known as *cognitive fluency*—the idea that we translate cognitive ease into actual ease. If something looks hard to read, we assume that whatever it's describing will be hard to do. By the same token, if something looks easy to read, we assume that whatever it's talking about will be easy to do.

To be clear, we make this judgment before we read a single word. We could glance at a densely worded recipe for making pancakes and immediately conclude that making pancakes is not for us.

Figure 2. SEPTA app, regional rail schedule interface

But if we glance at an imagery-rich, easily scannable recipe for making pancakes that uses exactly the same words, we'll be more apt to fire up the griddle. Better yet, a play button and a two-minute time limit might prompt you to ask, "Why are we not making pancakes RIGHT NOW!?"

It's the perception of ease that draws us in, not the reality of it. And it's the perception of difficulty that turns us away.

When I work with clients to conduct content audits, I take care to distinguish "Does it look easy to read?" from "Is it actually easy to read?" as criteria, because these are two separate, but equally important, factors in whether or not your content is successful. A help article might use the plainest language in the world, but if it looks like it's going to be hard to read, users will never know how approachable it is because they will never read it. And if the article looks super easy to read but is full of jargon and literally makes no sense, now you've just wasted your users' time.

Design for Believability

But the readability of content does much more than determine whether or not we will engage with it. Information that's easier and more pleasant to read is also easier to believe.

On top of that, we tend to believe things more if they rhyme. Yes, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away" seems truer than "You should eat more apples, bruh."

This has very real consequences: "If it doesn't fit, you must acquit."

Why are we so credulous? Well, we aren't gullible so much as efficient. We tend to believe things that are easy for our minds to process. If you think about this in terms of memory, it makes perfect sense. If I were to ask you what you got for your fifth birthday, odds are you wouldn't remember. A leading question like "You got a toy truck, right?" might give you pause. You wouldn't be sure. And you wouldn't necessarily believe it was true, because that memory is not easy to retrieve. It's difficult, if not impossible, to process.

On the other hand, if I asked you how confident you were about what you had for breakfast this morning, you would feel pretty confident because it just happened. It's really easy to retrieve. It's super easy to process. Odds are it's very similar to breakfasts you've eaten many, many times, which makes it even easier to process. Since it's easy to retrieve, it seems very believable. Easy to process becomes equated with easy to believe.

Things that rhyme are easy to retrieve. Things that are easy to read are easy to process.

This extends to name pronunciation.

There's a phenomenon called—wait for it—the name-pronunciation effect. And it's exactly what you would expect. People with names you find easy to pronounce are viewed more favorably than those with

names deemed difficult to pronounce, which can lead to promotions, votes, and more. In fact, when one study looked at law firms, the further up they went on the corporate ladder, the easier the names got to pronounce. It's worth clarifying that "easier to pronounce" is itself a culturally biased phenomenon. Depending on where you are, "Mary" is easy to pronounce. In other contexts, "Mbiyimoh" is easy to pronounce. But if that name is easier to pronounce in that environment, its owner has a leg up over folks whose names do not fall trippingly off the tongue of the dominant culture.

This even extends to stocks. A study of stock performance of IPOs as a function of the pronounceability of the name of the stock discovered that not only did stocks with easier-to-pronounce names perform better, but stocks whose ticker codes were easier to pronounce (KAR versus RDO) performed better.

People will put cash money down on things that are easier to process.

The plain-language aspect of this solution is, in fact, law.

Putting Credibility to Work

Our tendency to believe things that are easy to process matters because there are things in this world users need to believe. Like information about health and medicine, for instance.

It is an understatement to say there is a crisis of faith in health information from the government among African Americans. When prompted with the statement "The government usually tells the truth about major health issues, like HIV/AIDS," only 37 percent of African Americans responded with "Slightly Agree" or "Strongly Agree." That was in 2002–2003. By 2016, that had dropped to 18 percent.

By contrast, the number that agreed with the statement "The medicine that doctors prescribe to treat HIV is poison" went from 7 percent to 18 percent during the same period, and the number that agreed that "HIV is a man-made virus" went from 48 percent to 51 percent. In other words, the same percentage of African Americans believe that medicine used to treat HIV is poison as believe that the government tells the truth about AIDS. And far more believe that HIV is man-made.

One could write a whole other book (and, indeed, some have) about why African Americans have legitimate reasons to be concerned about health information coming from the U.S. government. Having said that, this is information that could save lives. So, if it needs to use big, bold typefaces and speak in plain language (common words and phrases that most people can understand) and, yes, even rhyme, so be it.

The plain-language aspect of this solution is, in fact, law. The Plain Writing Act of 2010 creates provisions for "clear Government communication that the public can understand and use." The guidelines are well worth a read, even if you don't work for the government.

But do these kinds of approaches really save lives? Well, a study around plain language, pregnancy, and smoking found that "pregnant smokers and ex-smokers who received a specially designed intervention with materials written at the third-grade reading level were more likely to achieve abstinence during pregnancy and six weeks postpartum than those who received standard materials."

Plain language and engaging visuals can also help caregivers who need to encourage their patients to take the right dose of medicine (or take it at all)—both very big problems in healthcare. In one study, a group of caregivers received instructions using plain language and pictographs; the results were fewer dosing errors and better patient adherence to taking the medicine in the first place.

Okay, you might say, that's all well and good, but can rhyming really help save lives? Well, the "Click It or Ticket" campaign to increase seat belt use, given a major law enforcement and advertising push in 2003, had the following result: "National seat belt use among young men and women ages 16–24 moved from 65 percent to 72 percent, and 73 percent to 80 percent, respectively, while belt use in the overall population increased from 75 percent to 79 percent" (**http://bkaprt.com/dcb/02-17/**). That's not to say this was the only factor in the rollout, but these results were measured after the rhyming campaign was added on top of existing law changes. What's more, "NHTSA (2005) estimates that for 'each percentage point increase in seat belt use, an additional 2.8 million people are buckled up, and about 270 lives are saved.'" That's 3,780 lives saved.

It's silly, but it works.

DAVID DYLAN THOMAS *(daviddylanthomas.com) is the author of the book* Design for Cognitive Bias *from A Book Apart and is the creator and host of the Cognitive Bias Podcast. He has developed digital strategies for major clients in entertainment, healthcare, publishing, finance, and retail. He has presented at TEDNYC, SXSW Interactive, Confab, An Event Apart, LavaCon, UX Copenhagen, Artifact, IA Conference, Design and Content Conference, and the Wharton Web Conference on topics at the intersection of bias, design, and social justice.*

LEVERAGING EMOTION ANALYTICS:

Augmenting DEI Efficacy in Approach and Sustainment

By ROZELLE MONROE

IT'S NO SURPRISE to learn that emotions drive all facets of human behavior—from the brands we choose to purchase to the organizations that we choose to work for. Marketers have adopted emotion analytics to influence our consumer behaviors. Can the same technology be leveraged to influence support for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives?

Extremism in Defense of Liberty

For twenty-eight years, a lone soldier exiled himself to the harsh elements of the outdoors. He was forced to transform his usual gait into an unusual creep while traversing the dense, torrid, and muggy jungles of the U.S. island territory of Guam. Recounting his ordeal, this flustered nomad claimed to have used the cover of darkness to hunt at night. And just the same, he employed the surrounding foliage, not only as clothing but, as concealment from potential threats during daylight hours.

Yokoi Shoichi, a sergeant who served in the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II, told reporters that he had arrived in Guam in 1943 for the second campaign against the United States for control of the Island. Ultimately, Yokoi, along with nine other Japanese soldiers, fled separately into the dark jungles after learning that American forces had successfully captured Guam. Within the cavernous regions of the Island's murky ecosystem the majority of these soldiers met their eternal fate, thus freeing them from the harrowing ordeal. However, Yokoi somehow survived the brutal elements, wildlife, and isolation of the jungle. And in January of 1972, he was discovered by two local men who were retrieving their shrimp traps near a small river basin.

As the story goes, U.S. planes dropped leaflets declaring peace in the jungle before and after Yokoi fled. But, proud and patriotic, he did not trust the Americans. So instead of surrendering (accepting the outcome), he opted to fight against a perceived U.S. occupation (resist change), by hiding in the marshes of Guam for nearly three decades.

Consequently, some may ask, how might such a story be relevant to the strategy of employing diversity, equity, and inclusivity by using emotion analytics (EA) to help us understand ways we can make it more effective, and less nominal? After all, some may argue that the actions of the Japanese soldier were beyond extreme. But were they? To what lengths and depths are you willing to go to

gain or sustain your freedom? Or let me put it another way: Are you free because someone said that you were? What have you done to garner universal freedom?

Freedom Without Power is a Mirage

The American abolitionist Frederick Douglass once said: "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will." According to CNN Money, millennials (born 1980–1999) and Gen Z (born 2000–present) are historically the most diverse. Out of 87 million, only 56 percent are white, compared to 58 percent white of Generation X (born 1965–1979), and 72 percent white Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964).

Why is this important? Well for one, it shows a trend toward a more diverse culture. We live within a society that has not always been so tolerant of those who do not find themselves a part of the dominant paradigm structure. Gatekeepers have long decided which groups to include and exclude, both in terms of equality representation and gender-exclusive language.

Considering this, as we strive to make change, it must register that the many institutions, systems, coalitions, laws, ideas, and the very language with which we choose to communicate all have been tainted with vestiges of an entitled and privileged perception of the way things ought to be! It will take more than numbers, I say. . .more than a bowl of alphabet soup to shake things up, and then shape things up. This is why we, as communicators, play such an important role in fostering inclusivity.

Moreover, statistics are great at helping display the bigger picture and putting complex things into perspective. But numbers alone are not going to necessarily solve the remnants of non-diversity, inequity, and exclusivity, all which seem to die hard; still waters do run deep! Demanding a paradigm shift is necessary if DEI is to be effectively realized.

White-Dominant Culture: Patronage or Patrimony

I have some pretty close relationships with those who benefit from white privilege, but who are committed to the struggles of fostering change in our society through DEI, whenever and wherever possible. And for every one of these friends that I have, I imagine that there are at least ten of their counterparts who enjoy the same privilege, but who embrace the corrupted inheritance. It works to their advantage to continue with business as usual.

While some diversity initiatives and programs have engendered hope, many are met with skepticism. Sadly enough, most outcomes have supported the latter, giving all the more credence to the postmodern idealism of this age. And so, it seems that we as an entire culture—the American culture, that is—are faced with a gut-wrenching problem. Do we roll-up our sleeves and commence to working, struggling, and fighting, ". . .by any means necessary?" Or do we accept the status quo, along with the long-standing ideas and policies that have impeded progress, still waiting for incremental change?

It's been two decades since Wall Street power houses like Morgan Stanley and Merrill Lynch adopted highly publicized diversity programs. However, these programs were created not with the goal of true diversity, but rather to fulfill requirements stemming from sex discrimination lawsuits of $54 million for the former and $100 million for the latter. Are we not concerned with the intentions behind an action, a program, or an initiative? Or are we appeased by diversity programs that exist in name only, rather than considering the results?

A common use case is that user experience can be adapted to a user's emotional response.

Leveraging Big Data and Artificial Intelligence

It is possible to effectively immerse a culture into the waters of DEI. Looking at universal human behavior through the lenses of emerging technologies, we find suitable resources for equipping us with solutions that could effectively address the contagions within the social fabrics of the communities in which we occupy. These technological tools and resources can perhaps help us to go beyond individuals' comfort levels or pessimism, and take DEI initiatives to the next level.

Emotion Analytics (EA) is underscored to be a promising tool. In the book, *Platform, Protests, and the Challenge of Networked Democracy*, Susie Currie Sivek describes EA as follows:

> "'Emotion analytics' as a term can encompass both hardware and software tools used to detect, identify, respond to, and even modify audience emotions. Though this term and the technologies it represents are not yet widely known to the general public, these tools are already becoming widely implemented throughout consumer electronics, digital publishing and social media, retail stores, and private homes."

Through the continuous research efforts of academia and industry, a number of companies have become early harbingers of this technology, as this has proved useful to fine-tuning and refactoring the tool. A common use case is that user experience can be adapted to a user's emotional response.

A computer outfitted with an EA tool could be operated by a user; as the user interacts with the machine, using algorithms that emulate a human's ability to detect emotions, the computer adjusts user-experience based on the emotion being presented. In essence, if a user becomes angry and decides to post inflammatory language on a social media website, the computer can impede the negative emotional response. If a company worker, turned disgruntled employee, happens to have admin rights for an area of a computer network that grants him access, EA tools could prevent a potential sabotage before it occurs and notify the proper personnel.

Many devices that have the capacity to facilitate many of the demands of EA tools: PCs, laptops, mobile devices, wearables (health-based), smart home assistants, smart home devices (dryers, washers, refrigerators, etc.). These devices all can be used to analyze human behavior. And because almost every person interacts with one or more, if not all of these devices, there would be no shortage of data from which useful metrics can be obtained. This, in turn, would allow technologists, UX personnel, and designers alike to develop content that appeals directly to human emotion.

EA tools could prevent a potential sabotage before it occurs and notify the proper personnel.

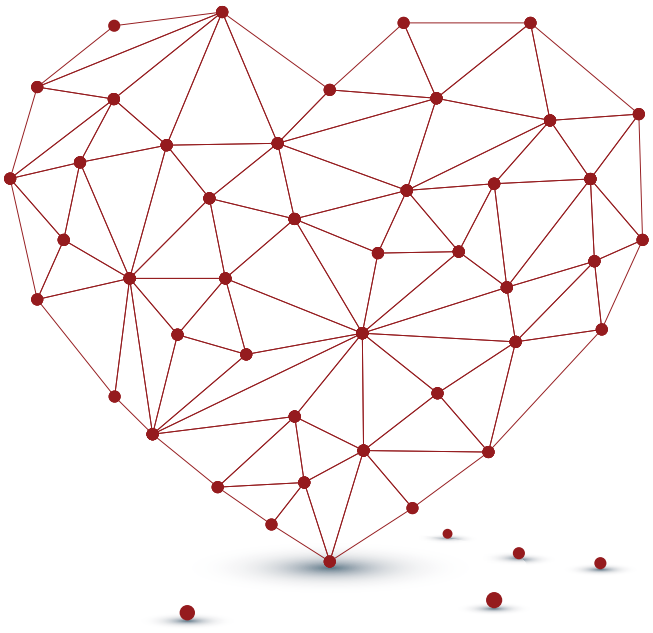
Using Technology to Affect Cultural Change

Why not use this technology to affect change in our cultural ecosystem? Technology has presented many ways in which to more effectively monitor the results of DEI in environments. Additionally, content could be developed that would encourage positive behavioral change. Using EA technology could influence the cultural change needed to implement an effective and more permanent form of DEI in organizations.

ROZELLE MONROE *(drm245@txstate.edu)*

Upon leaving his last job assignment as a civilian software test engineer for the U.S. Army, Rozelle Monroe had become discontent, disenchanted, and dissatisfied with the work conditions in which he kept finding himself, and so he began searching. And in a bizarre twist of fate, this longtime technophile found himself transitioning into the new role of graduate student into the MATC program at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas for a career remediation. He holds a BS degree in Computer Science from North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University in Greensboro, North Carolina.

It is passion for technology, love of people, and his drive to bring change to the ideas of the underrepresented regarding technology that these experiences are shared in this article. His hope is that by sharing his experience, awareness will give birth to motivation and courage, where technology will become more accessible through demand, and more appealing through an ability to change and transform lives.



REFERENCES

CNN Money. n.d. "Millennial Generation is Bigger, More Diverse than Boomers." Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://money.cnn.com/interactive/economy/diversity-millennials-boomers/.*

Dobbin, Fran. & Kalev, Alexandria. July–August 2016. "Why Diversity Programs Fail: And What Works Better." *Harvard Business Review.* Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail*

Jones, John & Trice, Michael, eds. 2020. *Platform, Protests, and the Challenge of Networked Democracy.* Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan.

Wikipedia. n.d. "Yokoi Shoichi." Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shoichi_Yokoi.*

PRECONFERENCE WORKSHOPS: 5-6 JUNE 2021

STC 2021 VIRTUAL TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION SUMMIT CONFERENCE & EXPO

5-9 JUNE 2021

Preconference Workshops
Over 80 Education Sessions
Virtual Expo Hall
The Honors Event
Social Networking and Entertainment

JOIN US!

www.stc.org

INDUSTRY INSIGHTS for Addressing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the TC Classroom

By RYAN WOLD, KATLYNNE DAVIS, ANN HILL DUIN | *STC Member*
AND LEE-ANN KASTMAN BREUCH | STC Member

EACH FEBRUARY, LEADERS from the University of Minnesota's Department of Writing Studies host a roundtable discussion with technical communication industry leaders inviting them to share their insights as it pertains to our technical writing curricula. This year, the discussion focused on how to improve the way instructors incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into a technical and professional writing course popular among upper-level undergraduate students. This focus is tied to the Department of Writing Studies' commitment to supporting DEI across our programs.

We see our work aligning with the statement from STC's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Panel to "respect, encourage, and develop" the perspectives and participation of all students, faculty, and staff. Our focus is also reflective of a turn to social justice by many academics studying technical communication. We agree with scholars who argue that the field needs to dedicate more attention to power, positionality, and privilege, and that technical communicators might act as advocates for change (Walton, Moore, & Jones 2019; Jones 2016). As one part of this social justice turn, we wanted to ask industry leaders to share how they think about and encounter DEI in their work.

Here, we share key recommendations from these discussions. We believe these could be valuable not only to educators, but also to practitioners who are committed to making technical communication a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive profession.

About the Roundtable Discussion

Those participating in the roundtable discussions are members of the University of Minnesota's Technical Communication Advisory Board (TCAB). Founded in

2014, TCAB works to build connections between industry and academia. The organization is comprised of an intergenerational group of 26 business and academic leaders who volunteer their time to provide exemplary networking and experiential learning opportunities to students across our BS, MS, Certificate, MA, and PhD programs.

It is important to note that neither TCAB members nor the authors of this article aspire to present themselves as experts on DEI or social justice. We also recognize that as white non-experts writing on this topic, we carry a position of privilege and have much to learn from those who are already doing this work who may be marginalized. The recommendations offered here come from our recognition that these are important issues that need to be discussed, and that anyone in a leadership position has a responsibility to contribute to these discussions. These are important steps forward that would benefit from additional feedback from students and industry leaders from marginalized identities.

In previous years, roundtable discussions focused on workplace competencies and integration of relevant assignments and experiences across required courses. For our 2021 Virtual Roundtable focus, we wanted to seize the opportunity to explore how our technical and professional writing course, listed as "WRIT 3562W," could more clearly center diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In each one-hour roundtable discussion, we encouraged members to share their experiences. Prior to the roundtables, we circulated a document containing the meeting agenda and contextual information about the course, including the course description, objectives, and the assigned textbook. After an overview of the Department's DEI efforts and DEI's current role in the

Technical and Professional Writing course, we asked members to provide their personal observations of DEI in technical and professional writing industries and any specific ways they see the course's approach to DEI could be strengthened. In total, nineteen members attended. These participants represented a wide range of industries and expertise, including UX, proposal writing, content management, project management, and technical documentation.

Key Takeaways

The TCAB industry leaders provided four top recommendations for instructors of technical communication courses.

1. Instructors should be aware that diversity involves a wide array of differences across race, ethnicity, gender, disability, culture, age, etc.

   In recounting their professional experiences, several members clarified that we should understand diversity as existing across many different types of groups, with many belonging to multiple groups at once. Members felt that technical communicators need to be cognizant of how to include and best represent these voices. They also recalled how DEI initiatives within their organizations often fail to capture the complexity of diversity.

   One person reported that their company has come a long way in how it represents racial diversity. For example, their manuals and marketing materials always include racial and ethnic diversity; however, there may still be resistance to representing people of different ages and abilities. Embracing these other elements of diversity can also play a role in practicing anti-racism, because it leads people to consider how other factors—such as class, age, ability, and life experiences—are connected to race, and will affect how inclusive a classroom atmosphere might feel or how accessible a technical document may be.

   Thinking about the various levels of diversity can also be a helpful teaching tool. For example, people that work in translation and localization are always thinking about the levels of diversity including language, regional differences, and individual characteristics. Language diversity influences the way a person experiences the world and a person's primary language abilities affect what information they have access to. People may share similarities at a national or cultural level, such as things that all Americans might have in common, yet at a micro level we know there are differences from region to region, and that each individual is different.

2. Technical communicators should design and communicate for difference, diversity, and accessibility from the beginning.

   TCAB industry leaders repeatedly emphasized that differences should be the starting point, not the end point, for all technical communication work. In our conversations, this meant acknowledging that white, non-disabled, English-speaking experiences should not be the "default." Instead, technical communicators should begin by asking about the needs of those with marginalized, intersecting identities, such as people of color, indigenous peoples, those with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ people, or those who do not speak English.

   Quite a few members discussed how accessibility was one area where technical communicators needed to better incorporate diverse perspectives. As an example, one member pointed out that while many websites were being created to help citizens locate COVID-19 vaccines, some designs clearly did not consider those who are unfamiliar with computers, who don't have consistent computer access, or those with sight-related disabilities.

   Members also noted that in some cases, concerns for difference were tacked on at the end, rather than being brought to the forefront of the writing or design process. At times, technical communicators might have to advocate for the inclusion of diverse perspectives in development processes. This by itself was a skill that members felt students needed ample practice with, especially considering some organizations' reluctance in addressing social justice. Students need to think of strategies for promoting inclusivity in their organizations.

3. Audience analysis can be a way to question implicit or confirmation bias and learn from various communities.

   As technical communicators, it was not surprising that members emphasized the importance of audience analysis. However, they shared that through experience they realized that implicit bias could have a major impact in how audiences are studied and what technical communicators conclude about the needs of the audience. When talking about the importance of interviewing audiences that are representative of end-users, one member recommended slowing down to confirm that what the interviewers heard matched what the interviewees were saying. Incorporating practices such as asking, "Here's what I heard. Is that what you meant?" can help practitioners ensure they are accurately reporting the desires of their audiences and not accidentally using

the interview process as a way of confirming their existing biases.

Asking these types of questions requires humility and patience. One member insisted that being able to ask these questions and listening to the answers should not be viewed as personality traits that some people have and some people don't, but as skills that can be taught and learned.

And the last aspect of audience analysis is always asking, "Whose voices are missing?" "Who haven't we considered?" "Who else might be affected?" A technical communication team might not always be able to fully answer these questions, but it is important to train students to practice asking and exploring new ways to answer them.

4. Developing "soft" skills in active listening and interpersonal communication are key for building mutually beneficial connections with diverse groups.

   Our roundtable conversations always circled back to the importance of interpersonal communication skills in building respectful relationships with others. Building these relationships was seen as setting a strong foundation that would, in turn, promote goals for diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplaces and work practices. Many described efforts to foster relationships as acts of equity and inclusion. In talking about their work with stakeholders from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, one member mentioned how it was crucial to take time to learn how to correctly pronounce colleagues' names so that everyone felt comfortable and respected. Devoting time to these types of interactions was a way to establish inclusive norms that would then set the tone for future interactions.

   In a similar example of establishing norms, another member explained how they gave colleagues from global teams additional time to process what was being said in meetings. Through their experience working with global teams, they observed that colleagues who did not speak English as a first language needed this time to absorb information communicated only in English. Observations like this were evidence that listening skills are an inherent part of working towards DEI. As a key component of audience analysis, listening was described as being necessary for fostering mutually beneficial relationships because it meant respecting speakers and giving them space to participate in conversations.

Conclusion

As we continue our departmental work with DEI, we're grateful to have TCAB as a resource that contributes to how we think about social justice in technical communication teaching and practice. Many of the topics that came up in our conversations echoed those already underway in our department, further underscoring the need and significance of bringing DEI to the forefront of our courses. However, TCAB industry leader insight, particularly on accessibility and audience analysis as DEI considerations, is invaluable to our thinking about the course's future development. We plan to share these takeaways with instructors teaching Technical and Professional Writing and other advanced writing courses in order to continue dialogue about what DEI means and looks like in technical communication.

RYAN WOLD *(TCAB@umn.edu) is a PhD candidate in Rhetoric and Scientific & Technical Communication at the University of Minnesota. Ryan's work focuses on the intersection of technical communication and entrepreneurship. He also works as a research assistant to the Technical Communication Advisory Board.*

KATLYNNE DAVIS *(TCAB@umn.edu) is a PhD candidate in the Rhetoric and Scientific & Technical Communication program at the University of Minnesota. She studies professional social media writing practices and digital literacy, and currently works as a research assistant to the Technical Communication Advisory Board.*

ANN HILL DUIN *(TCAB@umn.edu) is a Professor of Writing Studies at the University of Minnesota and Co-Director of the Technical Communication Advisory Board. She is currently working on a book about the future of algorithmic writing.*

LEE-ANN KASTMAN BREUCH *(TCAB@unm.edu) is a Professor of Writing Studies at the University of Minnesota and Co-Director of the Technical Communication Advisory Board. Her recent work focuses on how social media insights can be used to improve website usability.*

REFERENCES

Jones, Natasha N. 2016. "The Technical Communicator as Advocate: Integrating a Social Justice Approach in Technical Communication." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 46 no. 3: 342–361.

Society for Technical Communication. n.d. "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Panel." Accessed 27 March 2021. *https://www.stc.org/committees/deiap/.*

Walton, Rebecca, Kristen Moore, & Natasha N. Jones. 2019. *Technical Communication After the Social Justice Turn: Building Coalitions for Action.* New York, NY: Routledge.

STC's Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

BY WENDY ROSS | *STC Associate Fellow*

THE STC DIVERSITY, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Panel (DEIAP) was developed to provide advice, insight, and recommendations on matters of diversity and inclusion to both the STC Board of Directors and the STC staff. The goal of the DEIAP is to ensure not only equitable access and treatment of all persons and a diversity of voices in all things STC, but ultimately to create a pervasive experience of inclusion and belonging for all who interact with STC.

The panel provides guidance on a range of diversity, equity and inclusion areas, so that the Society can consider and take actions that include members and potential members of different age, nation of origin or nation of residence, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, marital status, education, language, physical appearance, and ethnic identity. The DEIAP seeks to impact how STC members, leaders, and guests *feel* about engaging with STC at the international and local level.

Early Work: Clarifying STC Stance and Policies

The DEIAP formed in the summer of 2020 under the leadership of Chair Wendy Ross, with inaugural members Andrea Brennan, Agnes Crentsil, Viqui Dill, Liz Fraley, Toni Mantych, Mak Pandit, and Roger Renteria.

Its first action was to develop the following policy statement, adopted by the board, to express STC's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the broadest terms:

> "STC is committed to supporting the participation of all members, volunteers, and guests across the globe. STC policies and training will ensure we all respect, encourage, and develop our colleagues' perspectives, ideas, and efforts, while providing opportunities for growth to all members."

The DEIAP is currently working on updates to the STC Ethical Principles. A link to these principles can be found in the References section at the end of this column.

2021 Focus

In 2021, to help STC fully realize its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, the DEIAP will develop recommendations for educating leaders, members, and guests about unconscious bias and ways to practice inclusiveness. This work will include guidelines on how to use more inclusive language in all our communications—at home, at work, online, and in STC meetings and programs. The panel will also recommend or conduct content reviews to ensure that STC websites, publications, presentations, and webinars are inclusive.

How You Can Get Involved

You can help us meet our DEI goals! First, if you have ideas for diversity, equity, and inclusion programming, articles or resources you'd like to see, or if you have leads on effective educators or resources, please contact Wendy Ross or any member of the DEIAP.

Second, keep your eye out for upcoming training programs and articles and let us know if they are impactful.

Third, help us model inclusiveness by being aware of STC's commitment to DEI and treating everyone with respect, celebrating differences, and asking people how they want to be treated, rather than making assumptions.

Fourth, be an ally and speak up if you see behavior that you consider harassment or not inclusive. If you do not feel comfortable intervening in a situation, support the victim in private and ask STC how the organization can help.

Finally, participate as a leader in your Chapter, SIG, or run for STC office. Diverse candidates and leaders who support DEI initiatives are critical for our success.

WENDY ROSS *(wendyapmp@gmail.com) is an STC Associate Fellow and former President of the STC Rochester Chapter. She is the Chair of STC's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Panel (DEIAP), Former Director of the DEI Committee for the PMI Rochester Chapter. Wendy is a senior project manager and a doctoral candidate at St. John Fisher College, focusing on leadership and DEI.*

REFERENCE

Society for Technical Communication. n.d. "STC Ethical Principles." Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www.stc.org/about-stc/ethical-principles/.*

2021 Technical Communication Summit: Benefits of Going Virtual

VIRTUAL TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION 2021 SUMMIT CONFERENCE & EXPO

STC'S TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION Summit is the premier conference for technical communication education and networking. This year's virtual event gives attendees an opportunity to learn and connect from the comfort and safety of their homes. Thinking about **registering**? See below for just a few of the many reasons why you should join us!

A virtual Summit in our new world offers exciting capabilities including:

- **Global Reach –** the virtual format allows attendees to network, learn from, and connect with technical communicators the world over.
- **Convenience –** attend the Summit from the comfort of your own home!
- **Reduced Cost –** connecting virtually eliminates many of the additional costs to attendees that come with an in-person meeting including travel, accommodations, meals, and more.
- **Platform Enhancements –** we've made enhancements to our virtual platform, based on attendee feedback from last year's virtual Summit, that will allow for a better user experience and more opportunity to take advantage of all the Summit has to offer.
- **Extended Access–** full registration includes complimentary access to Summit OnDemand – including recordings of over **80 education sessions –** through **31 August 2021**. Even if you can't attend the Summit entirely on its set dates or just a specific session live, you will have the opportunity to access any session recording when your schedule allows.

One-Day Rates Now Available!

Only want to attend the Summit on a particular day? One-Day Registration is now available! Please note, One-Day Registration does not include access to Summit OnDemand.

Learn more and register at **summit.stc.org.**

Contribute to STC's *Notebook*

STC'S NOTEBOOK BLOG serves an important role of keeping the STC community updated on Society news and events as well as sharing industry news and insight from STC members.

STC invites you to contribute to the blog with your own content. If you have something to share with the technical communication community, send your submission to publications@stc.org for consideration.

Upcoming Workshops and Courses

Make Your Content Usable by (Almost) Everyone: An Introduction to Accessibility

(A Half-Day Workshop)

Saturday, 5 June 2:00 to 6:00 PM Eastern Time (GMT-4)

Instructor: Char James-Tanny

Accessibility means making things available to everyone. We're familiar with this to some extent, thanks to curb cuts. But we can also make our content accessible by following several guidelines. During this workshop, we'll use the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) to learn several techniques for making our content more accessible. (Even though WCAG includes "Web", the principles, guidelines, and success criteria lend themselves to documentation, even if it's not online.)

Register now at: **www.stc.org/course/make-content-usable-june-2021/** (Registration closes 21 May 2021)

The Power of Storytelling in Business and Life

(A Half-Day Workshop)

Sunday 6 June, 2:00 to 6:00 PM Eastern Time (GMT-4)

Instructor: Alan Hoffler

Storytelling is known as the Silver Bullet of communication. Storytelling can apply to most any situation, takes relatively little preparation, and is used by the masters of the stage and the pen in just about every forum imaginable. You'll find ways to immediately put this weapon in your toolbox and WOW your audiences and readers, and have them ready to listen to your pitch, platform, paper, or presentation.

Whether you're a hesitant speaker or a communicator who wants to be GREAT, this session will teach you a valuable and easy-to-learn technique to captivate your audience. In addition to learning about the Silver Bullet of Storytelling, you will practice and apply it to your message, whether it's a technical presentation at work, a networking event, a sales/persuasion situation, or your online content marketing plan.

Come learn the one communication skill you can't live without!

Register now at: **www.stc.org/course/storytelling-june-2021/** (Registration closes 21 May 2021)

Making Accessible Media: Audio Description Fundamentals

(Asynchronous course) | 7 June to 12 July 2021 (Mondays)

Instructor: Brett Oppegaard

Note: Watch the recordings of the class sessions at a time convenient for you and complete the assignment by the time determined by the instructor.

If you aren't making your media accessible (on your websites, mobile apps, brochures, signs, exhibits, etc.), you are excluding people— a lot of people. In the U.S., for example, there are about 20 million Americans who are blind or visually impaired. An efficient and effective solution is Audio Description, which is recommended by the American Council of the Blind and many similar associations around the world. Audio Description is the remediation of visual media into audible media, primarily for the inclusion of people who are blind or visually impaired. This translation process is the focus of this Making Accessible Media course.

This six-session asynchronous and online course will teach you about Audio Description as a field of study, as a collection of related genres (such as portrait description, artifact description, map description, etc.), and help you to be trained and self-sufficient on the open-access, online, and award-winning UniDescription toolkit, which will allow you to immediately and anytime thereafter create and share your Audio Description in accessible formats, including text, HTML, and machine-voiced Mp3.

The course will have five weekly checkpoints with the instructor, in which you write Audio Description about a provided piece of visual media, and then get feedback on your description from your instructor and participating classmates.

Intended audience: Content creators working in digital media of all types, who would like to make their content more accessible, especially for people who are blind or visually impaired.

Register now at: **https://www.stc.org/course/accessible-media-060721/**

Can Codes of Ethics Help Moderate Online Communication?

This column features ethics scenarios and issues that may affect technical communicators in the many aspects of their jobs. If you have a possible solution to a scenario, your own case, or feedback in general, please contact column editor Russell Willerton at *russell.willerton@gmail.com.*

BY MICHAEL TRICE | *STC Member*

ONE OF THE overriding concerns for knowledge workers across all fields is the unsteady state of online conversation and moderation. Spaces like Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and YouTube dominate these conversations. But public forums for customer engagement have been vital in technical communication, from MathWorks and Apple's public knowledge bases to Stack Overflow and GitHub collaborations. And while most of these spaces remain relatively safe from the most disruptive aspects of popular social media for now, GitHub has certainly found itself susceptible to use as a space for organizing harassment. It's also true that Twitter and Facebook have become increasingly popular spaces for providing customer support, handling complaints, and offering other forms of service outreach. Thus, the same failures of moderation that lead to cultural and political breakdown and disruption on social media are technical communication problems for both institutions and society.

The disruption of social media takes numerous forms: the rise of conspiracy, the unsteady relationship between private and public reputation, the harassment, the sudden surges of activism, and many more difficult-to-predict eddies and swirls. It is highly unlikely to abate anytime soon—maybe not for decades. The medium of print offered an incredible long-term boon after development of the printing press, but it also destabilized society for generations. How can industry navigate prolonged instability?

Perhaps, in industry, the massive disruption wrought by social media most resembles the impact of World Wars I and II upon professional ethics in engineering and the sciences. Some ethicists have started to return to that shift in discussing digital accountability. In calling for increased ethical scrutiny of large image datasets used in AI training, Vinay Uday Prabhu and Abeba Birhane show how concepts of informed consent trace back to the 1964 Helsinki declaration and 1947 Nuremburg code. In our recent work, Liza Potts, Rebekah Small, and I have also discussed the value in understanding how industry codes of ethics differ before and after the World Wars.

Before the post-war shift, most engineering codes of ethics resembled that in Figure 1. They focused heavily upon the values of integrity and personal trust as the main principles of the professional. The professional also served peers and customers. There is a marked lack of attention paid to public welfare or communities beyond peer interactions; modern codes now frequently show concern beyond individual companies.

Yet, after World War I and II, the codes of ethics shifted significantly, as seen in Figure 2. Now these shifts occurred for many complicated reasons. Nationalization and globalization of industry were both key. The rise of corporations, regulations, and formalized training as part of the professional process played a role. But as Parbhu and Birhane noted with the advent of new medical rules, industries that had played a destructive role during the war embraced ethical reform to help rebuild and stabilize public trust.

Perhaps Vannevar Bush's article "As We May Think" most directly wrestled with the question of what

Code of Ethics of American Association of Engineers

Any code of ethics must be predicated upon the basic principles of truth and honesty. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest," are the things for which engineers must contend.

An engineer may not "go beyond and defraud his brother" by any underhanded act or method. He may not do or say anything which will injure his brother's reputation or his business for the purpose of securing his own advancement or profit. This admonition carries with it no obligation to refrain from telling known and absolute truth about an unworthy brother, as a protection to others; but the truth so told must be such as can be substantiated, and he who tells it must have the courage which will not shrink from the consequence of his telling.

The engineer owes his client allegiance demanding his most conscientious service. But conscientious service to the client must never entail a surrender of personal convictions of truth and right.

An engineer who receives compensation from an employer may not receive gift, commission or remuneration of any kind from a third party with whom he does business for that employer.

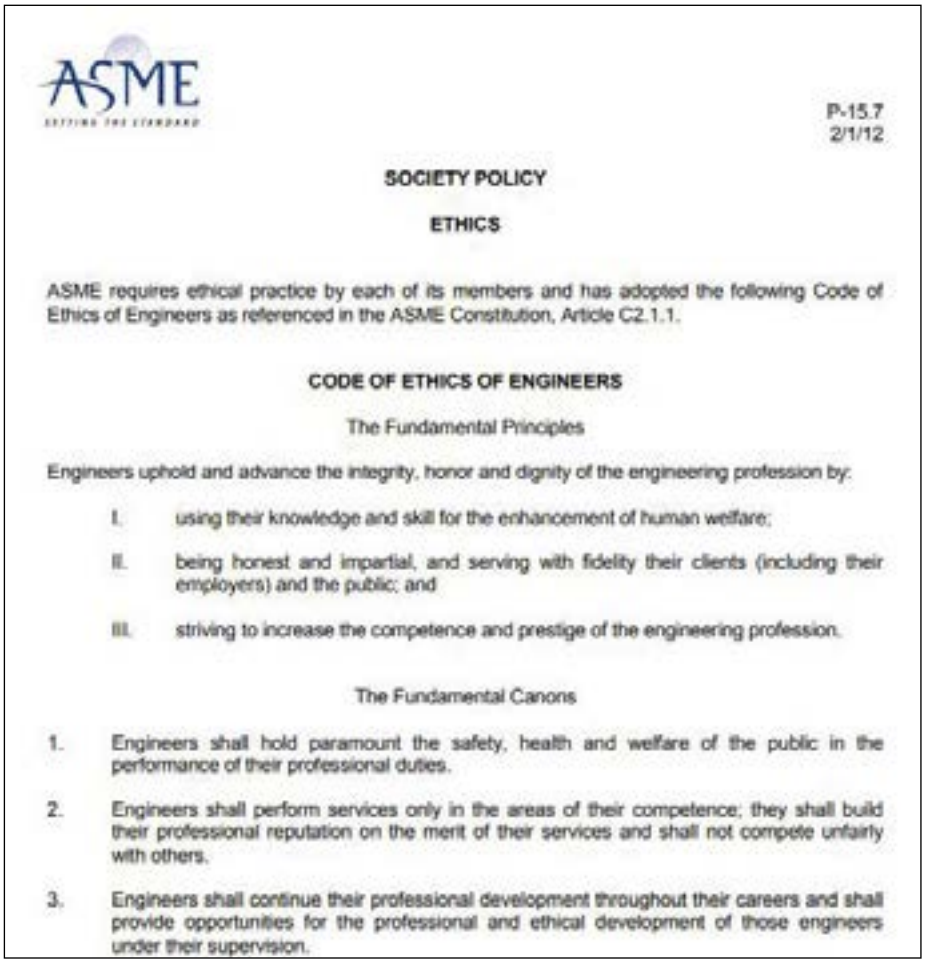
An engineer seeking to build up his business may not resort to self-laudation in advertising. He may state briefly the lines of work in which he has had experience, and enumerate responsible positions which he has held and give his references.

An engineer who employs others either in his own service or in that of the client who employs him, should recognize in his relationship to them an obligation of exemplary conduct, of helpfulness and personal interest in those with whom he is thus brought in contact, and he should discharge such obligation tactfully and kindly.

The honor of the profession should be dear to every engineer, and he should remember that his own character and conduct reflect honor, or the reverse upon the profession.

If, then, he so lives that his own honor shall never be smirched by his own act or omission, he will thus maintain the honor of the organization to which he belongs.

Figure 1. 1920 Code of Ethics from the American Association of Engineers



ASME

P-15.7
2/1/12

SOCIETY POLICY

ETHICS

ASME requires ethical practice by each of its members and has adopted the following Code of Ethics of Engineers as referenced in the ASME Constitution, Article C2.1.1.

CODE OF ETHICS OF ENGINEERS

The Fundamental Principles

Engineers uphold and advance the integrity, honor and dignity of the engineering profession by:

I. using their knowledge and skill for the enhancement of human welfare;

II. being honest and impartial, and serving with fidelity their clients (including their employers) and the public; and

III. striving to increase the competence and prestige of the engineering profession.

The Fundamental Canons

1. Engineers shall hold paramount the safety, health and welfare of the public in the performance of their professional duties.

2. Engineers shall perform services only in the areas of their competence; they shall build their professional reputation on the merit of their services and shall not compete unfairly with others.

3. Engineers shall continue their professional development throughout their careers and shall provide opportunities for the professional and ethical development of those engineers under their supervision.

Figure 2. ASME Fundamental Principles and Opening Canons

scientists and engineers must do now after having "left academic pursuits for the making of strange destructive gadgets." Industry needed citizens to trust and believe in the good will of science and engineering again. This need for public trust increased following the destruction of war, the inhumanities of engineering as a tool of the Holocaust, and the eventual, persistent threat of global nuclear war. During a time of great disruption, it is incumbent upon industry to hold itself to account and demonstrate a capacity of care for humanity.

Consider what a typical code of ethics now looks like in Figure 2. Note the inclusion of both principles and canons: principles tend to be a group of 3–6 fundamental values supported by canons, or guiding rules. While shown here in part, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) code includes ten canons in total as of the last update in 2012.

The National Society of Professional Engineers (NPSE) goes even deeper, with six principles, 14 canons, and dozens of clarifying points added within those canons. I note that both ASME and NPSE begin with a fundamental principle highlighting that their fields serve the "welfare of humanity" or "the public." Honesty is not replaced as a value, but public care is placed above and in support of that trust.

One mechanism of this care was industry reorienting codes of ethics around universal values based upon the welfare of all humanity. This reorientation went beyond the single value of personal integrity championed in the pre-war era.

It is similarly vital that industry now demonstrate a capacity of an ethic of care. Jared Colton, Steve Holmes, and Josephine Walwema note that particular tactics of technical communication are best judged upon whether they enact harm or "horror" upon the most vulnerable. Much like concepts of informed consent and seeking

the welfare of the public, this type of principle value asks members of industry to demonstrate first to the public, especially the marginalized public, that we place their well-being before any other goal. Our sense of online community moderation can reflect values of clarity and openness. Such a principle might even inspire technical communicators, as Miriam F. Williams and Natasha Jones suggest, to develop new, imaginative responses to address the social injustices and ethical issues of our unstable times.

The public understands that the internet has supported a deeply unstable time of disruption. Numerous industries and institutions have seen the public's trust degrade over recent decades. While technology and industry are not solely to blame, industry can move to rebuild public trust. Just as industry used post-war codes of ethics to change hearts and minds, industry can now use codes of ethics to embrace transparency and accountability to promote the public good in online platforms. An ethic of public care can inform principles of open communication and free speech on social media.

MICHAEL TRICE *(mtrice@mit.edu) is a Lecturer at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, U.S.A., in the Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication program. He holds a doctorate in Technical Communication and Rhetoric from Texas Tech University. Michael's career in industry includes working for Apple Computer, Hart InterCivic, and Deutsche Bank.*

REFERENCES

AAE Code of Ethics. 1920. Accessed 7 April 2021. *http://ethics.iit.edu/codes/AAE%201922.pdf.*

ASME Code of Ethics. n.d. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www.asme.org/wwwasmeorg/media/resourcefiles/aboutasme/get%20involved/advocacy/policy-publications/p-15-7-ethics.pdf.*

Birhane, A., & Prabhu, V. U. 2021. "Large Image Datasets: A Pyrrhic Win for Computer Vision?" In *Proceedings of the IEEE/CVF Winter Conference on Applications of Computer Vision* (pp. 1537–1547).

Bush, V. 1945. "As We May Think." *The Atlantic Monthly*, 176, no. 1: 101–108.

Colton, J. S., Holmes, S., & Walwema, J. 2017. "From NoobGuides to# OpKKK: Ethics of anonymous' tactical technical communication." *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 26, no.1: 59–75.

Jones, N. N., & Williams, M. 2020. "The Just Use of Imagination: A Call to Action." Teacher Scholar Activist. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://teacher-scholar-activist.org/type/gallery/.*

NSPE Code of Ethics. n.d. Accessed 7 April 2021. *https://www.nspe.org/sites/default/files/resources/pdfs/Ethics/CodeofEthics/NSPECodeofEthicsforEngineers.pdf.*

Trice, M., Potts, L., & Small, R. 2019. "Values Versus Rules in Social Media Communities." In J. Reyman & E. M. Sparby (Eds.), *Digital Ethics: Rhetoric and Responsibility in Online Aggression*. Routledge.

Read *STC's Notebook*

The official blog of the Society for Technical Communication, *STC's Notebook,* is your source for STC news and insight from the STC community.

Visit *www.stc.org/notebook*

Contribute to the *Notebook!*
Send your submissions to *publications@stc.org*.

Local History and Tabletop Games

BY TIMOTHY ESPOSITO | *STC Fellow*

ONE THING I'VE learned in life is that when you develop a good skill set, you learn to apply it to multiple situations. Technical communication skills fit into many roles outside the workplace, and the more skills you have, the more places you'll find to use them. In some cases, they are used for volunteering, and others purely for social enjoyment. In the moments that I'm not working, playing with my son, or volunteering with STC, I've found a couple of engaging pastimes.

Several years ago, I was offered the opportunity to join my township's historical commission, which was a good fit for a History/English major. The Cheltenham Township Historical Commission maintains a colonial-era historic house museum, the Richard Wall house, just outside of Philadelphia (https://bit.ly/3dL6RL4). The commission needed a financial secretary and an update to their email communication newsletter. Fortunately, my experiences with volunteering with the STC - Philadelphia Metro Chapter (STC-PMC) put me in a place to handle both. For STC-PMC I served as treasurer and publicity, so I was comfortable examining finances and using MailChimp to create and send electronic newsletters. Within a short time of joining the commission I upgraded their email list from a plain text message to a more professional, monthly, email newsletter. Even the commission's bi-annual printed newsletter, the *Wall Paper*, is now included as part of the monthly email newsletters, reaching a wider audience than ever before, including residents of our namesake town in the U.K.

The Historical Commission's latest initiative is to create interpretive historical posters to educate visitors on local history, from notable events (first public reading of an abolition proclamation in America) to famous residents (ranging from Civil War financier Jay Cooke to a *Titanic* victim for whom Harvard's library is named). Again, my technical communication skills are proving helpful as we collaborate on creating instructive materials that will appeal to educators and tourists.

While working on historically themed projects is stimulating, my other, more relaxing, passion is playing tabletop games with my friends and family. Most people will think of *Monopoly* and *Scrabble* as example tabletop games, but I am more interested in the new generation of tabletop games. Some of these games, such as *Carcassonne*, come from Europe and have a very different feel from traditional American games. One of my favorite game mechanics is *cooperative gaming*, where the people collaborate to beat the game itself as a team, rather than compete against each other. An excellent and timely example of such a cooperative game is *Pandemic*, where each player represents a scientist racing to treat and cure diseases before sickness overwhelms the earth. If the diseases spread too far, everyone loses the game, so coordination between players must occur to ensure a shared victory. However, competitive games are also great, and with my family I enjoy *Ticket to Ride*, where players vie to build railways across the country, connecting cities to score points. Some games sate my interest in history, such as *London* where you rebuild the devastated city following the Great Fire, and *Concordia*, an ancient Roman empire-themed game centering on production, trading, and expanding your commercial network.

Teaching the game rules to new players can be a fun form of technical communication. Modern tabletop games are a great way to bring together friends, family, and even coworkers. I regularly play tabletop games (now online due to the pandemic) with the tech writers in my office, and even with STC members from across the country.

TIMOTHY ESPOSITO *(tmesposit @gmail.com) loves to make history approachable by tying it to local places and events. After collecting more games than anyone should own, he enjoys teaching friends how to play them. To join other technical communicators for online board games, sign up here: https://bit.ly/3siQjhQ.*

Figure 1. Pandemic *pits a team of doctors against four diseases, represented by colored cubes, that are ravaging the world*

Experience Professional Growth with STC Education!

STC offers a wide variety of online education options throughout the year. Whether you need an introduction to a subject, an in-depth review, or just a brush-up, STC has what you need. Advance your career with STC's varied collection of online education.

Live Weekly Webinars

Multi-Week Online Courses

Recorded Webinars

Free On-Demand Seminars
(Members Only)

STC

Visit stc.org/education

CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL

Technical Communicator

CPTC™

FOUNDATION

- **Project Planning**
- **Project Analysis**
- **Content Development**
- **Organizational Design**
- **Written Communication**
- **Reviewing & Editing**
- **Visual Communication**
- **Content Management**
- **Production & Delivery**

CONTACT

For more information about certification and to start the process, visit *www.stc.org* or email *stc@stc.org.*

Certified Professional Technical Communicator™ (CPTC)

Advance your Career and the Profession
Earn the CPTC Foundation Credential Today

The Certified Professional Technical Communicator (CPTC) credential assures employers, colleagues, and the public that you have the knowledge and skill to handle complex technical communication projects from the project planning stage through production and delivery.

Benefits

Why earn the CPTC credential? Because the CPTC credential:

- Distinguishes you from your peers;
- Shows you have the most up-to-date knowledge in the field;
- Opens up job opportunities and enhances job mobility;
- Elevates the profession;
- Gives you a sense of pride in your career; and
- Demonstrates your commitment to the field.

The CPTC credential gives you the edge you need to stand out to employers.

Continuing Education Requirements

Points may be obtained the following ways:

Event	Points
STC Annual Membership (any membership type for Foundation certificants)	2
STC Recorded Webinar (self-study)	1
STC Live Educational Webinar (free, sponsored, and community webinars excluded)	2
STC Online Courses	6
STC Summit Pre-Conference Courses (full day)	6
STC Summit Pre-Conference Courses (half day)	3
STC Annual Summit	8
Begin and complete a college-accredited course related to the Technical Communication field	8
Published articles that relate to any aspect of *Technical Communication* (2/article)	2
Published books publicly available on topics related to *Technical Communication* (5/book)	5
Presentations at conferences related to aspects of *Technical Communication* (2/presentation)	2
Total needed within 2 years post-certification date	**12**

Fees

Exam fees: STC Members $250, Non-Members, $495

Be a leader. ***Take your career to the next level by obtaining your credential. It's the most efficient way to prove your skills and knowledge in the technical communication field.***

Advance your Career and the Profession — Earn the CPTC Foundation Credential Today!
Learn more at www.stc.org/certification